Teaching itself: a mythology of learning in theory and practice

"Schrecklich ist die Verführung zur Güte!" (Brecht)
("Terrible is the temptation to do Good!")

"These fragments I have shored against my ruin" (Eliot, The Waste Land)

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Wolverhampton for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by published work

This work or any part thereof has not previously been presented in any form to the University or to any other body whether for the purposes of assessment, publication or for any other purpose (unless otherwise indicated).

Signature…Pete Bennett…… Date……29/05/2021……

Abstract

What I attempt in this dissertation is to make coherent sense of a body of work produced with others over a period of ten years. This was a decade in which the progressive principles that inform my work were being progressively pushed back by an increasingly nihilistic neoliberalism across the Western world and a peculiarly retrogressive manifestation (The Govist turn) in the UK. In the most extreme case a book that was conceived as creatively and playfully reimaging Media Studies 'after the subject' turned out almost to be the subject's epitaph as its survival at A level turned out to be a close run thing. I hope in passing to consider the impact of this context but also to argue that the context of writing this commentary, at the time of a global pandemic, has probably added more significantly to its value, which I measure only pragmatically, of ideas being produced in a way that is useful to other people. As the pandemic has exposed our flawed models of education far more powerfully than I could myself, indeed have myself, so it has also provided an imperative for affirmative critical action.

I hope this work can make a small contribution to that process in suggesting ways in which we might fundamentally perform the educational 'act' differently. For that reason there is a more heavily weighted focus on the ways in which my more recent publications constitute a hardly intended deconstruction of the dominant educational paradigm and tentative presentation of an alternative in four steps. As this has been an interpretation of the work inspired by this process alone, I have tried also to make the creation of the commentary an active element of the final version. In this I am partly acknowledging the influence of Barthes' famous book lengthy critical study of his own work, 'RB by RB'. I would like to think that the structures, fluidity and playfulness of the commentary also convey something of the whole project.

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Acknowledgments

I salute the endless patience of my supervisors, Professor Michael Jopling, ‘chameleon, comedian, Corinthian and caricature’ and Brendan Bartram who was so turned on by my lack of conclusions. Much love and respect

And Mu (mom) and Roy (dad, much missed) who showed me the value of learning

Also and always, my wife Karon and our four children who taught me there was more to life than books.

Pete Bennett: The Published Work considered by this commentary

Bennett, P, Kendall, A and McDougall, J, (2011) *After the Media: Culture and Identity in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.

- Extract from Introduction [1]
- Extracts from Bennett, P. (2011) *Power after the media* (Chapter 1), *Genre after the media* (Chapter 2) and *Ideology after the media* (Chapter 4) [2]

Bennett, P and McDougall, J (eds), (2013) Barthes' Mythologies Today: Readings of Contemporary Culture. New York: Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies.

- Bennett, P. (2013) *Barthes after Barthes* (Chapter 30) [3]

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- Bennett, P. & Smith, R. (2018) "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" – Identity and resistance in further education [5]

- Bennett, P. & Smith, R. (2018) *Conclusion: Identity and the collective purpose of further education* [6]

- Bennett, P. (2018) *Character Building: how accommodating is the FE Newbuild™?* [7]

Bennett, P. (2019) *Why We Should Never Become Classroom Managers* in Robinson, D. (Ed.) *Classroom Behaviour Management in Further, Adult and Vocational Education: Moving Beyond Control?* [8]

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- Bennett, P (2020) Chapter Two: Landscape with Figures [10]

- Bennett, P. (2020) Chapter Nine: Unbent Springs: A Note on a Scepticism without Tension [11]

- Bennett, P. (2020) Chapter 10: Unbent Springs: A Note on the Uprooted and the Anxious [12]

Bennett P, Scott H and Wilde J, (2020) *Stranger in a strange land – reclaiming the terrain for a disorientating dilemma and the possibility of forgiveness* in Caliban's Dance: FE after the Tempest. Editors: Orr K, Daley M, Petrie J . London, UCL/IOE Press [13]

Note

All of the work included here is sole-authored with the exception of the extracts from introductions/ framing chapters ([1],[5],[6]) which were co-authored with Julian MacDougall [1] and Rob Smith ([5],[6]) and the two co-authored chapters ([9], [13]). I've tallied these *pro rata* against the word count.

PROLOGUE
IN WHICH SOME PRINCIPLES ARE PROPOSED, PUBLISHED WORKS ARE CONTEXTUALISED AND A HISTORICAL CONTEXT ESTABLISHED

"But I've always had a sound instinct about what should be published and what should not, having always believed that publishing is senseless if not an intellectual crime, or rather a capital offence against intellect." (Thomas Bernhard, *Concrete*)

"I sit in one of the dives on 52nd street, uncertain and afraid, as all the hopes recede of a low dishonest decade" (Auden, *September 1, 1939*)

The purpose of this prologue is to offer an overview of the work and a feeling for it before the presentation in a series of 'episodes' of firstly a tentative methodology and then an extended commentary on each selected work. The 'spirit' of the work is an important element for me, as is the fact that the published work has to be able to speak for itself. This commentary will attempt to find useful contexts for the work and may at times operate more as a companion piece. For reasons that will become clear, I'm not inclined, nor even in the best position, to explain.

A theory of Pre-texts

"The living can assist the imagination of the dead" (Yeats: *A Vision*)

In recent years, my publishers Routledge have been reluctant to allow pre-quotation apparently because copyright rulings on 'fair use' have sought to disallow it on the grounds that "the purpose and character of the use" is merely 'decorative'. Such was the case that I had to seek special permission to use pre-texts in the recent Hoggart book, *The Uses of Media Literacy,* on the grounds that part of the 'pretext' of the Hoggart project

was a partial recreation of his seminal work *The Uses of Literacy*, for example by using the same chapter titles. I argued that Hoggart's pre-quotes were vital to his intention and approach: so important indeed that in my chapters the first port of call is a discussion of these significant contexts, which might also function as overtures for the chapters or, to extend a musical analogy, 'themes'.

The film director Quinten Tarantino has spoken about how choosing the theme song of a film, which plays over the opening credits is vital for "trying to find the personality of the movie, find the spirit of the movie" (Thomas-Mason, 2018). I think these pre-quotations perform a similar function, creating what Tarantino calls 'mood time', though the mood here is intellectual, cultural and often ideological. That is certainly the case with Richard Hoggart, whose work Kate Pahl described as "caught between personal writing, community writing and thinking about culture" (in Bennett et al, 2020: 131) and for whom the theme music is somewhat caustic and problematic. In the key chapter with the painterly picturesque title, 'Landscape with Figures: A Setting', the problematic is provided by a fragment from The Waste Land. This establishes a position that impacts any reading of the whole chapter, adding a dimension to the experience of the text which my own re-reading of Hoggart also tries to activate.

In the context of the Hoggart re-imagining I write of the pretexts as establishing a relationship "between the interpreter and the interpreted": My own pretext for that still key chapter is the lyric to Pulp's Britpop anthem 'Common People', which is possibly equally provocative. As such it provides a source of intellectual and creative energy, Tarantino sees it as a 'trigger', which motivates the work that it precipitates. It also reflects the approach embodied in the published work and articulated most notably by Rancière, which suggests that ""There is a perceptible texture to experience that must be

found and that can only be found by doing away completely with hierarchies between different levels of knowledge, politics, society, intellect or popular culture”(Rancière, 2016: 29). One of the functions of the pre-texts is to argue for this texture and for a range of sources on the basis that “there are resonances and things you can feel and understand based on those resonances…” (ibid).

I write this early because the point of this prologue is to set a tone and a context, perhaps even a flavour and the work and this commentary are littered with these changes of mood, these tonal gestures. Across the piece, these subtexts are torn from literary texts, a satirical novel, song lyrics and TV as well as philosophical and academic sources. And everywhere they make the case for an incorrigible plurality, crazier than you think, in a style that is consciously allusive. Here is the beginning of an explication of method which is also at times also largely an account of time spent thinking and writing.

The truth is that, like Rancière (2016: 26), “I just threw myself into it, starting with a heap of fairly scattered leads that came at me from all sides”. And here I go again, though now bizarrely the stirred up papers and little pamphlets are mine: “I'd say it consisted in the things you feel by trawling a bit randomly after stirring up a mass of papers and after consulting almanacks or the little pamphlets of mad inventors or corny little vaudeville acts”(Rancière, 2016: 26). This seems an even better reason to hold true to Barthes’ commitment, “to live to the full the contradiction of my time, which may well make sarcasm the condition of truth” (Barthes, 1972: 10).

This commentary provides a series of contexts for the published work catalogued above and delivered alongside. Perhaps the most significant of these contexts is the historical, both in terms of the simple chronology of the writing but also in terms of the significant trajectory of educational policy over the last thirty or so years. The low dishonest decade that frames

the work here has not led to a world war but it has had catastrophic consequences for our public systems of education. Indeed, the pandemic has brought this neoliberal project in education most associated with Michael Gove and his 'special' advisor Dominic Cummings to a kind of crisis as alarmed parents have for the first time tasted the fruits of programmed learning.

Looking Back Over My Shoulder

"There is no wound that time gives that is not bandaged by time" (RS Thomas: *Album*)

At a recent Team Exchange Day, the latest manifestation of Inservice Training (INSET) we were asked as University teachers, planning for the future, to consider where we were in 1990, professionally and intellectually. My response was decidedly on the one hand personal and emotional and yet on the other staged and symbolic: both inconceivable and yet completely coherent. In 1990 I was teaching in a secondary college and in my not entirely reliable account we were coming to terms with the educational disaster which was the 1988 Education Reform Bill. And much of the work done or described here suggests I still am!

I started teaching in a secondary school in 1985 and started writing for publication in the late nineties. All of my work both as a teacher and as a commercial and academic writer is coloured by my suspicion of and opposition to this model of curriculum and assessment. My first ten years as a writer (1999-2009) coincided with New Labour's development of this model, particularly with reference to the introduction of the Curriculum 2000 initiative which introduced a two stage A level. The work addressed here which has been produced in the last decade, coincided with the 'doubling down' of these models of accountability which led to Michael Gove's controversial reforms which I elsewhere labelled, "the very moment

that ‘academic subjects’ were being given their most substantial post-mortal revalidation since the Second World War in a programme of reform bizarrely oblivious to the world pupils and students now inhabit” (Bennett, 2016; 163)

Barthes declared in *Mythologies* that he was frustrated everywhere to see History presented as Nature (Barthes, 1972). Though the work collected here has, as a primary strategy, the employment of mythic (largely literary and popular cultural) narratives to ‘mythify the myth’, it does this in a consciously situated historical context which it would be useful to establish here. The thirty five years I have spent in education as a practitioner, always as a teacher and for two decades as a published writer, offer a useful case study in what C. Wright Mills called ”the enveloping techniques of political domination”(Wright Mills, 1959: 13). I experienced them decidedly in two phases decisively punctuated by Michael Gove’s reforms which firstly endangered and then dispatched the A level in Communication and Culture that I co-authored and ran for AQA between 1999 and 2019. This project provided me with an unprecedented opportunity to render principles as practice on a national scale. It remains my most significant educational intervention as teacher, writer or academic.

Communication and Culture was the name given to our development in the noughties of A level Communication Studies into something more like Cultural Studies. It was predicated on critical theory (and the ideas of theorists) but as something to be used rather than remembered and used on a course content which was summed up as ‘the meanings and practices of everyday life’ (MPEL). Our belief, like Lefebvre that “Human beings must be everyday people or they will cease to exist” ((Lefebvre, 1977, vol. 1: 135).) brought us into glorious conflict with *The Daily Mail* and the Campaign for Real Education. The former

condemned us in print and online as “an A-level in being a teenager” (Roberts, 2008) because it “entails a study of celebrity body images and allows pupils to write about clothes and hairstyles”. Selecting only those elements of the course most toxic to their readers’ simple prejudices they attacked “source material like The Drifters hit *Kissin' in the Back Row of the Movies*” and asking students to describe “the cultural significance of their bedrooms and friends” before claiming without justification that “critics are concerned it will lack academic rigour”. Meanwhile, as ever, they reserved their greatest moment of horror-anger for the fact that “pupils opting for "popular music as cultural communication" can investigate sources such as "CD recordings". The ‘concerned critic(s) turned out to be none other than Nick Seaton, of the Campaign for Real Education, who said: "Many parents and employers will consider this a waste of school time and expect an A-level covering 'culture' to concentrate on great literature, art or music."(Roberts, 2008). AQA offered a fairly bland defence suggesting that "Communication and culture is a dynamic area of study with a strong contemporary orientation," but adding that "A central theme of the specification is an exploration of the meanings and practices of everyday life." It said much about the subject and the autonomy we enjoyed as course designers and exam setters in those days, that our immediate response was to set this critical response as an exam question! More than ten years later *The Daily Mail* is a set text in A level Media Studies, required reading.

The Curriculum 2000 initiative offered to the largely working class students I taught in the post-industrial Black Country a considerable amount of purchase on their potential for achievement inside of a traditional, academic brand. It also offered equally unprecedented opportunities for my co-author and myself to put into practice a range of ideas and commitments involving a cultural literacy which had little or nothing to do with cultural capital (save for critiquing Bourdieu’s premise). In the open access college where I was

teaching, student achievement (recorded as exam scores) significantly improved, particularly in Arts/Humanities. Freed from the tyranny of three hour endpoint exams, these products largely of white working class and Asian heritage backgrounds were better able to show their knowledge and understanding and build achievement across more focused module assessments.

In our subject the focus was on the student as cultural studies practitioner, offering active readings of everyday life predicated on a range of critical theories, which were to be used, not learnt. This also meant providing a course that was much more responsive to the needs of Higher Education in its development of critical autonomy, particularly through coursework provision that allowed both for creative work and substantial academic writing. It was ironic then that one of the stated reasons of the latest reforms (2010-15) was the apparent failure of AS +A2 to adequately prepare students for university. An extra irony was the blanket opposition of the HE Sector to these reforms.

Looking back over a longer period the further implications of New Labour's decision to live with and indeed extend the model of accountability and control instituted in the Education Reform Bill of 1988 are clearer. Barker exposes this, when he writes that "The Conservative reforms, followed by New Labour's determination to identify and transform poor performance, created therefore, a coercive, top-down, compliance-driven system" (Barker, 2008: 674). Predicated on the need to furnish comparable data (those much derided and divisive 'league tables'), this neoliberal reform initiative metastasised during the nineties, fed by an ever more reliable 'blood' supply in the form of ever more tests, and micro-managed interference in curriculum via for example the almost unnoticed transition from 'syllabus' to 'specification' (knowledge as a list). In the name of transparency and empowering students,

these lists were 'checkable' at every level, meaning students would never again anxiously ask, "Is there something I should know?" The flavour of these reforms was certainly non-traditional, not least because they put an apparent end to traditional linear A levels and the opportunity that it offered for some of us to work progressively was unprecedented. However, the model it reinforced became ultimately the vehicle to carry all of this innovative work away. Sometime later it became clear to me that I have been working with the fallout from 1988 for the whole of my career, firstly with misdirected momentum and latterly with considerable friction.

For what was happening structurally to the curriculum was also being played out across the post-compulsory sector within the context of "managerialist approaches to organising public sector education" through neoliberal assumptions which seek "to replace political judgment with economic evaluation" (Bennett & Smith, 2018:1). This is pretty much the constant backdrop to all of the published work selected here. Moreover, it is a constant struggle because "A common response to the limited gains achieved so far is to call for even more thorough, even more rigorous reform to transform the classroom and raise standards" (Barker, 2008: 673).

<u>Paradise By the Dashboard Light</u>

"If man is incapable of changing reality, he adjusts himself instead" (Friere, 1973: 4)

One way to place this in a broader context is to offer a case study which records how these attitudes were 'let in'. I received a journal entry in 2013 from a student who was working as a numeracy teacher in a large local college. He described a meeting with his line manager which I still find emblematic of the state of the FE sector at the moment of writing. It is a

conversation that is likely to have gone on in many schools and colleges. Here is the full-nerved version of what research calls "result-enhancing tactics" which are often much more than teaching to the test (Barker, 2008). The journal writer stressed the cheerful way this communication was undertaken.

My day was spoilt by a 'little chat' requested by my manager. It went as follows:

'How many students have you in your class this year'

'17' I replied with knitted brow.

'Jolly good, they must all pass', he responded with guffaws

'Well yes, I'm sure they'll all do their best', I replied.

'Yes, I know that, but they must all pass even if we have to put them in a separate room and give them a hand' (Ok, so you're getting all this so far, hang tight there is more) 'so that we can give you more teaching hours next year'. (Mark, Journal entry 2013)

This conversation expresses precisely what was and is happening everywhere but more importantly 'how' it has happened and is happening: the world ending with a whimper rather than a bang. The common sense of wanting students to succeed works progressively not only as a means of control but also ironically to make that success less meaningful. Ball (2003: 215) somewhat darkly identifies the fact that "The novelty of this epidemic of reform is that it does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are". Hence the work throughout this enterprise to remind teachers and students that who they are is both self-determined and specific. It reminded me of an

episode of the sixties' cult series *The Prisoner*, a show which aired almost precisely across the ecstatic faultline of the countercultural moment between the release of *Sergeant Pepper* and the Summer of Love in 1967 and Dubček's 'socialism with a human face' that led to the Prague Spring and all manner of student unrest thereafter. As a beneficiary of that moment when society briefly embraced the insistent present and, realising there is no other day, decided to try it another way. I can only admit a vested interest. For I am a child of *Plowden*, at least symbolically, that other significant event of 1967 and for many the apotheosis of progressive, humanistic, even humane education in England. In this I seek the longer view, as the hawk sees it and the persistent presence of hope whose resources are always easy to find.

The Prisoner is the story of a secret agent who wants to reclaim himself from a life of patriotic skulduggery but is offered instead only a retirement of comfortable confinement in 'The Village' and a number to conceal his identity and deny his individuality. He is Number Six and each episode's credits end with him insisting "I am not a number but a free man" which is greeted every week with maniacal mocking laughter. It is tempting perhaps to see this as a metaphor for the position of the contemporary teacher, beset by calls to duty and the constraints of local despots. In the episode entitled 'The General' Number 6 is offered the chance to 'speed learn' by a Big Brotherish learning guru dubbed the General and looking straightforwardly military in what turns out to be a clever sleight-of-hand (it's really a different kind of 'general' that carries the threat here!). A poster is displayed around the village to emphasis the satirical character of the pitch. Bearing the General's image, it promises a "3 year course in 3 minutes". However closer inspection and all that was equally risible in 1967 comes shockingly into view. Here is a powerful reinforcement of my argument elsewhere that one of the implications of the neoliberal turn is that the risible has

become respectable and reason has become unreasonable. And this joke very quickly turns out not to be funny anymore and precisely because it is too close to home and too near the bone:

Figure 1: Is the satire of 1967, the common truth of 2013?

There are three elements of the poster that offer an insight into the way we learn now (or do not). First comes the offer of 100% entry and 100% pass, also hilarious in 1967 and a commonplace by the end of the last millennium, an expectation even. The words at the bottom of the poster then become chilling. Take "it can be done" which keys into Bernard Barker's (2008) arguments around education policy's "relentless pursuit of the unattainable", a process of recession that has been tracked decisively in recent work by Matthew Clarke. Using Stanley Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, Clarke explores the pattern of 'fantasies and disavowals that characterise education policy claims despite the

deplorable track record, in other words education policy's history of 'inflated claims about both the fulfilment of the child and the development of society [that] are endlessly broken in practice' (Donald in Clarke, 2020; 152).

Clarke argues with great energy that "this mutual dynamic of fantasy and disavowal that we can see at work in *Eyes Wide Shut* is also at work in the tensions between the official, idealistic, but fantasmatic, face of education policy discourses and the often disavowed violence and domination inhering in and resulting from education policy when it attaches itself to these fantasies…" (Clarke, 2020: 153). Clarke also represents education semiologically as an empty signifier, "emptied of any concrete, specific meaning, while simultaneously quilting together and articulating a number of other signifiers, such as 'wealth', 'success', 'excellence', 'aspiration', 'productivity' and 'knowledge', in order to represent an idealised universal value, binding state, nation and society together in the name of a fullness-to-come" (*ibid*).

<u>In Search of Signs that Dissimulate Nothing</u>

If we see this across a period of time it is clear that Clarke and Barker are recording a process familiar to Baudrillard as the Precession of the Simulacrum. For Baudrillard we inhabit a hyper-reality constituted by signs that simulate rather than represent and there is a movement from 'signs that dissimulate something to signs which dissimulate that there is nothing' (Baudrillard 1994, 6). These 'simulacra', these images without originals, develop as signifiers in relationships ever more removed from reality, which Baudrillard describes as a precession:

• 'It is the reflection of a basic reality

• It masks and perverts a basic reality

• It masks the absence of a basic reality

• It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.'

(Baudrillard, 1994: 17)

As I write elsewhere, "The first casualty of hyper-reality is 'the real', historically, geographically and culturally situated" (Bennett, 2017: 82). And this feels like a pretty convincing account of the long term impact of educational policy on signifiers like 'teacher' and 'education'. Clarke cites Žižek in developing his ideas about education as an 'empty signifier' suggesting 'a signifier whose signified is an enigma for the members themselves – nobody really knows what it means, but each of them somehow presupposes that others know it, that it has to mean "the real thing", and so they use it all the time' (Žižek in Clarke, 2020: 153-154). Clarke points out that "Empty signifiers are not an aberration but a fundamental aspect of any (political) order of discourse" (Clarke, 2020: 153). This seems congruent also with the performative element of 'teachering'(the consciously awkward term I use to signify the possibilities that remain for teachers to 'do good') that came in with the broader reforms, the 'terrors' of which have been explored in detail by Ball and others (Ball, 2003; O'Leary, 2013; Smith & O'Leary, 2013) for as Judith Butler points out, the performative is not only about performing, it is also non-referential, a key element also of simulacra. Indeed what Butler, somewhat uncomfortably spells out about gender is easily applied to the account we are exploring of the reductive reconstitution of the teacher and the educative act:

"because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, 1988: 522)

Much of the work collected here (and explicitly Barthes' project in *Mythologies*) is engaged in the task of exposing these processes whereby the manufactured behaves as if it were organic. This is prompted by Barthes but is also a response to Žižek's appeal that "The ultimate ethical task is that of truly awakening: not only from sleep, but from the spell of fantasy that controls us even more when we are awake" (Žižek 2006: 60).It is also involved, and this dimension of *The Prisoner*'s insightful critique escaped me for years, with insisting on the specific, the importance of subjectivity and agency as the only viable response to the 'general' (rather than the General!). It is categorization that must be resisted just as it is in Butler's work on gender: "Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but if this continuous act is mistaken for a natural or linguistic given, power is relinquished to expand the cultural field bodily through subversive performances of various kinds."(Butler, 1988: 531). Hence Clarke fires a broadside against the 'paradoxical suggestion', "implicit in much official education policy, that essentially comparative notions like 'excellence' can be generalised so as to be evident 'everywhere'?" (Clarke, 2020: 152) . This is also the point that Bartram *et al* make about teaching excellence in higher education which Readings had been arguing more than twenty years before would lead to a hollow redundancy (in Bartram et al, 2019). Yet still the world pursues as the Teaching Excellence Framework follows the Research Excellence Framework remorselessly in pursuit of the Knowledge Exchange Framework .

This generality predicates the final and perhaps most gallingly pertinent and alarming of the poster tropes: “Trust me”. As with Ka the snake in *The Jungle Book* we know in this case what ‘get with the mission’ entails: this is not the “trust without ground” that Biesta asks for (Biesta, 2005). Rather, as the rational leads only to irrationality, it is the system’s last resort, to operate, as Peim suggests, “as a Heideggerian ontotheological principle”, a matter ultimately of faith (Peim, 2012: 32). This may indeed be the point. In Habermas’ analysis when a system, designed to help, becomes disconnected from the Lifeworld, it indeed becomes pathological, hence justifying Ball’s presentation of the “terrors” the model engenders (Habermas, 1990). The playwright Edward Bond said something similar and perhaps on a more relatable scale about organisations:

“Not all communities have a culture. Some only have an organisation. The members of an organisation are often only monkey people, who can organize and run advanced technologies and elaborate institutions and governments- but these things don’t make a culture. An organisation is concerned only with efficiency (though it is finally inefficient”) (Bond, 1976:xii).

Across over thirty years the neo-liberal project of reform has sought ever greater efficiencies of purpose with well-documented consequences. There is a good deal of this in our contextualizing of our collection *Identity and Resistance’* (Bennett & Smith, 2018). Though it might sometimes appear that resistance is futile, the very character of the reconstitution of education and teaching allows much room for renegotiation. For if education, like gender is “in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time -an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts.” then the possibilities of transformation “are to be

found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style."(Butler, 1988: 531)

This may focus on the production of subjectivity as a site of resistance, the ways neoliberalism "'does us' – speaks and acts through our language, purposes, decisions and social relations (Ball, 2012 in Ball & Olmedo, 2013). It may expose the implications of a test-based self-perpetuating, avowedly rationalist and academic approach to reinventing standards, "leading to increased selection and separation of students who are thought to be 'academic' in secondary schools" (Gillborn, 2005: 494). For Gillborn, for example it is noteworthy that despite the claims that educational rigour operates from a detached neutrality that "of the five principal ethnic categories monitored continuously since the late 1980s, only one group—whites— have enjoyed consistent year-on-year improvement" (Gillborn, 2005: 494). In fact the consciously provocative claim that "evidence suggests that, despite a rhetoric of standards for all, education policy in England is actively involved in the defence, legitimation and extension of white supremacy"(ibid) is in fact just reinforcing the fact that education policy is ideologically constructed as a screen to obscure the re-entrenchment of traditional power . This chimes with Clarke's notions of fantasy and disavowal, which in turn takes much from Barthes' notion of myth as a double system which "like a turnstile is always presenting either/ both meaning and/or form. As such it is an alibi and as Barthes points out "truth is no guarantee for it, nothing prevents it from being a perpetual alibi". Like education in contemporary debate, "it always has an elsewhere at its disposal" (Barthes, 1972: 122).

Clarke also critiques this self-perpetuating system that Berardi elsewhere dubs a "zero-zero game", launching a scathing attack on the 2016 White Paper (Department for Education,

2016), *Educational Excellence Everywhere*. Most tellingly he points out that "education is never defined or debated in the policy document, in terms of its aims and purposes, although assertions are made about how it 'unlocks opportunity' and functions as 'the engine of social justice and economic growth'" (Clarke, 2020: 156). Here is the double system doubling down, because here 'education' (whatever it is) has no exteriority since "good education equals 'good' (i.e. high, rising) results in standardized achievement tests" and thus success for one can only come from another's failure. Thus the internal markets which promise to drive up standards increase only the socio-economic and educational polarisation of schools (Gorard et al.:2002). And where does this leave 'standards' and 'excellence' and the rest of that *mötley crue*? Clarke is unrestrained:

"This leaves the notion of excellence as a cipher, a tautological, non-referential term (Royle 2003: 55; Readings 1996), masking the fact that all it does to describe a school or education system as excellent is to say that it is excellent at being excellent (Royle 2003, 55)." (Clarke, 2020; 156)

Here is more mythology and more darker purpose since even the neoliberal straitjacket which is the national default can be eased aside for natural selection: "But we also want academies to use their freedoms to innovate and build more stretching and tailored curricula, to meet the particular needs of their pupils or their local area or the particular ethos of the school' (Clarke, 2020; 159). As Clarke points out "Coded within this and other statements is an attachment to outdated notions of fixed, innate ability" which is something "to which teaching needs to be accommodated and which requires marketisation, and the 'freedom' to exercise 'choice', in order to distribute educational excellence – and with it, life

chances – more efficiently than was possible in the bad old days of 'unnecessary bureaucratic interference and central prescription' (*ibid*).

The inconsistencies here are laughable but tragedy is often preceded by farce. With aspiration and achievement irreconcilable in the current climate of remorseless competition, the system sets of on what Bernard Barker has called 'the pursuit of the unattainable" (Barker, 2008). Barker attempts a twenty year review of the reforms, painstakingly deconstructing the premises on which the original act was predicated. He is keen to remind us of the "contested, political origins of the National Curriculum", suggesting that as a result "the consequences of its distinctive bias are under-estimated (Apple 1989 in Barker, 2008:675). Barker is devastatingly straightforward, stating that "the curriculum is designed mainly for those with good general intelligence and leaves many unable to improve beyond a well-defined cognitive ceiling", which means that "the performance tables promote therefore a distinctive, unacknowledged set of values" (2008: 676) . Barker is clear both about "the raw incompatibility of excellence and inclusion" and the reliance on data that are "invalid, unreliable and often misleading" (ibid). He agrees with Thrupp (2008: 678) that "it is unrealistic to expect the education system to produce radical change in the relative performance of students from impoverished backgrounds". His conclusion is sobering suggesting that educators are being placed in an impossible (yet highly charged) position: "their imposed mission increasingly resembles a forlorn hunt for an unattainable, holy grail-like solution to our problems (Thrupp, 2007: 678)". Moreover he is clear that evidence suggests that "the central policy-making apparatus and its manifold agencies have themselves become an important obstacle to improvements in the quality of education" (Barker, 2008: 679).

This is a potted history of our current predicament and a context for all that I have published, both submitted and otherwise. It assumes that “The events of human history - our wars, our elections, our culture - are not fossils embedded within the earth's geological strata” and “history is not that which lies behind us in the past but rather that which occurs here with us in the present” (Colquhoun, 2021:27). Colquhoun is writing in an introduction to the critic Mark Fisher’s final lectures, a series tragically interrupted and unfinished by his untimely suicide. These thoughts about history come, channelled through Fisher’s explorations of post-capitalist desire, from the Hungarian literary critic, Georg Lukács who wrote that “it is only in history in the historical process in the uninterrupted outpouring of what is qualitatively new that the requisite paradigmatic order can be found in the realm of things” (Lukács, 1923: 144). This seems to me to epitomise the challenge for all that might call itself ‘research’: “the uninterrupted outpouring of the qualitatively new” (Colquhoun, 2021:27). Lukács argues that history only happens when things change, which seems propitious in 2021. I accept, with appropriate humility, the challenge of the ‘qualitatively new’ but also that the work might contribute to Lukács’ ‘true history’, which is “the history of the unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man” (ibid).

Not Ceasing From Collaboration

“You've been with the professors
And they've all liked your looks” (Dylan: *Ballad of a Thin Man*)

Like Lukács, I am irredeemably committed to the collective and all the work, including this commentary, submitted towards the award is a result of genuine, whole-heartedly committed collaboration. Indeed, the principle and practice of collaboration is a central part both my published work and these responses to it as a matter of both propriety and

philosophy. Though the vast majority of my writing is single authored, there are only a couple of co-authored chapters, this writing of mine is always contextualised by some project or other, some collective endeavour, most of which I am also co-driving and co-directing. It is this collaboration that principally defines and confirms the writing as research because theses contexts are the projects to which my induvial contributions lend their weight. If this is sometimes and somewhat in tension with the principle of individual contribution sought here then so be it. Though the 'characters' of the various combinations are made clear in the details of the Published Work and will be clarified below, my decision to use 'we', 'us' and 'our' goes beyond the specific attribution of individuals. 'We' also speaks of a larger, deeper and richer principle of collaboration which involves the desire to be involved with others in common enterprise. This work is ours and continues to be so.

More prosaically you can see these collaborations chiefly in two sets. Firstly there are those centring around myself and Professor MacDougall (Julian) and involving the professors Kendall (Alex) and Potter (John) at either end of the period. These are focused on Media Education and Literacy: unsurprisingly since we co-edit Routledge's Research series. Then there are my collaborations with Professor Smith (Rob) (we are working on our second book project currently) and with my work colleagues, which are equally predictably focused on F.E. and Teacher Education. Neither of these strands is dominant, though the strong emergence of the second strand is felt markedly in Episode Five. This is a collective of sorts, bound together by a good old cause and my story is also theirs.

1
IN WHICH A DEBATE IS HAD ABOUT RESEARCH: WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT DOES AND HOW IT MIGHT BE HARNESSED

"I'm forced to produce a discourse with signposts that are acceptable. You have to do this from time to time because people want you to. They want you to do 'theory' the way they understand it." (Rancière, 2017: 33)

"All Method is Fiction" (Mallarmé in Sontag, 1993: 476)

This consciously episodic commentary requires both a methodological context and a rationale. In this 'episode' I will attempt to provide both. The selection of published work to which this commentary is addressed represents about half of the work I have produced and make public in the last decade. Hopefully, this edit constitutes a coherent account of some of what I have been thinking and doing across a decade which has proved problematic to those ideas I am most keen to develop and promote. My published writing in the decade preceding that was a series of text books and resource books, chiefly for A level, written out of my own experience as a teacher and as a senior examiner for the AQA examination board. In this period the wind was metaphorically with me as the Curriculum 2000 experiment brought with it a new desire for breadth, indeed for the kind of interdisciplinarity which I had long been seeking. Even the regulators seemed supportive of creative developments. The work covered by this commentary (2011-21) seems by comparison something of a rearguard action, engaged in what Brendan Bartram charitably calls a project of productive subversion.

Like Barthes I am suspicious of the idea of *oeuvre*, a 'body' of work, because I too "delight continuously, endlessly, in writing as a perpetual production" "(Barthes, 2020: 141) but I have found myself better understanding my earlier work and in the case of *After the Media* just beginning to understand it. Therefore, it is appropriate that the timescale of the award should lead back to that point since that work was written as Barthes suggests 'blindly', "lost, bewildered and driven" (ibid). What I really mean by 'understand' here (given it is often a problematic term) is to appreciate the potential patterns, the themes perhaps, that recur across the various projects.

When Does Self-Study Become Research?

"The subject of my research oddly though unavoidably is myself" (Peim, 2018: 88)

If the work is to be taken seriously as research, which it must be, 'project' is a good place to start, since as the Prologue explained, these works are essentially parts of projects building to a 'project of projects'. In his justification of self-study (the autobiographical element of social scientific research), C. Wright Mills writes that "personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues and in terms of the problems of history-making" but also that "the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles and to the problems of the individual life" (1959: 226). Here is the call for social science research to include "both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations" (ibid). He also suggested that "Every man [is] his own methodologist!" (1959: 123) and that in this role that " methods must not prescribe problems; rather, problems must prescribe methods" (1959: 72). As my subject is explicitly 'teaching itself, the 'problems are essentially ontological: not what works, but what's going

on? As such this work is centrally concerned with what Rancière calls “re-establishing a debate’s conditions of intelligibility”, the conditions under which theories, practices and arguments might conceivably make sense” (Rancière, 2006; 4).

In his essay *Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers*, Barthes opines that “between the language of the teacher and the intellectual there is hardly any incompatibility…but the writer stands apart, separate” (in Sontag, 1993: 478). This he takes up further under a propitious subheading, ‘RESEARCH’ suggesting that “’Research’ is then the name which prudently, under the constraint of certain social conditions, we give to the activity of writing; research here moves on the side of the writing, is an adventure of the signifier, an excess of exchange…” (in Sontag, 1993; 386). I would like to explore and embrace this and the notion that research “whatever it searches for it must not forget its nature as language” (ibid).

This is congruent with Rancière’s notion of Universal Teaching which is also an influence on and explication of much of my work:

“This is the way that the ignorant master can instruct the learned one as well as the ignorant one: by verifying that he is always searching. Whoever looks always finds. He doesn’t necessarily find what he was looking for, and even less what he was supposed to find. But he finds something new to relate to the thing that he already knows. What is essential is the continuous vigilance, the attention that never subsides without irrationality setting in—something that the learned one, like the ignorant one, excels at. The master is he who keeps the researcher on his own route, the one that he alone is following and keeps following.” (Rancière, 1991: 33)

Of course this also chimes well with his friend Biesta’s model of learning by response:

“We can look at learning as responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess.

While learning as acquisition is only about getting more and more, learning as responding is about showing who you are and where you stand." (Biesta, 2005; 60)

This suggests a tentative methodology which is largely provided by Peim's innovative recent contribution: the notion that research is "thinking written into an essentially open genre that requires the decision-making competence of the researcher" (Peim, 2018; 3). What this offers to me here at the point of proposal is a methodology that might encompass both my attempts to 'understand' the work and the work itself since I am inclined to think that my writing is, for better or worse, like "all research… a kind of philosophy" (Peim, 2018; 3). When asked what it is I do in the context of the production of work, I am happiest with the designation 'writer'. However, if pushed I have always also offered 'speculative theorist', partly as a front. Although I accept that the speculative is an epistemological stance, I warm to Heidegger's aversion to epistemology which he claims "continually sharpens the knife but never gets round to cutting" (in Inwood, 2000: 13). I prefer his rather more direct approach to prioritising what needs to be thought about.

In terms of 'teaching itself' what principally needs to be thought about is that teaching itself needs to be thought about as something more than a functional (hence neutral) conduit that needs to be lubricated and regularly cleared/ cleaned. In preparing his call for the cessation of the teaching of reading in 1970, Postman (1970: 1) offers a precise account of what is at stake, firstly in overview: "All educational practices are profoundly political in the sense that they are designed to produce one sort of human being rather than another which is to say an educational system always proceeds from some model of what a human being ought to be like". This he then presents in terms of the details: "This includes everything from the arrangement of seats in a classroom, to the rituals practiced in the auditorium, to the textbooks used in lessons, to the dress required of both teachers and students, to the tests

given, to the subjects that are taught and, most emphatically, to the intellectual skills that are promoted" (Postman, 1970:2). Here is the challenge (Wright Mills' 'problems' and 'troubles') of addressing the research subject, which I express more inelegantly in this unpublished contribution to an internal autoethnographic project:

My current model for conceptualising/ theorising/ exposing/ expounding/ dramatizing* the job/ business/endeavour/ vocation* of being a teacher concerns, I guess, a particular and personal (perhaps idiosyncratic) element/ manifestation/ extension* of reflective practice. This takes the form of a ritual question, formulated either in situ or an imagined version of this and the question is "What the fuck am I doing?" (*Delete as applicable)

<u>Some examples of the falsely obvious</u>

My conscience and my history

The myths that make me sing! (Nick Burbridge)

Too often these questions are not raised and the whole education debate is conducted as if all the conventional rules of argument are suspended on the grounds that while everybody is entitled to an opinion, we all know how it comes out (in the wash?). In this bizarre hyper-reality where suspicion of pedagogy is combined with an obsession with technique, complexity is replaced by longwindedness and theory is decried as abstracted and 'unrealistic'. This of course allows the unthinkable both to happen and be said, to be living in a developed country where the achievement of 'disadvantaged' children is twice as close to the achievement of those with Special Educational Needs than it is to the general population (and there are suspiciously no public statistics on the achievement of the advantaged). These facts create a context, I hope, for my gall when I hear an Education Secretary, desperate for

exams to be sat in 2021, suggest that exams offer the best opportunity for children from less advantaged backgrounds. However, my gall really derives from the fact that it is still possible to circulate these ideas, which I identify as classic Barthesian myths because this for Barthes is the very point: "However paradoxical it might seem, myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (Barthes, 1972; 120). Because exams have been taken and 'less advantaged' students have sometimes passed them well, despite their disadvantage, we have in the world this excuse for inequality that mostly functions as a way of keeping the questioning away from the real problem. Thinking because some disadvantaged kids pass tests that exams are good for disadvantaged kids puts the focus squarely on how to help the other kids to pass and dismisses the alternatives fiendishly. This is because the 'back-facing' part of the myth also insinuates that 'less advantaged' pupils are likely to suffer from unfair treatment in teacher evaluations which in turn confirms the need for an exam. In this way the circle is closed, access is denied and any criticism is taken to be an attack on those clever working class kids who are doing it for themselves. Peim has this as an aspect of what he calls 'the myth of social salvation', a spectral figure that haunts educational policy because, as Barthes explains, myth "is a language which does not want to die: it wrests from the meanings which give it its sustenance an insidious, degraded survival, it provokes in them an artificial reprieve in which it settles comfortably, it turns them into speaking corpses" (Barthes, 1972; 132).

This reflective surface will require something more robust than common sense. As Peim advises, "Knowing the object differently from its surface modality may demand the intervention of theory – or thinking – to reveal dimensions that no amount of data production can give access to" (Peim, 2018; 39). In this case my theoretical approach has been and will be as a mythologist seeking to reflect on educational myths in the way Barthes reflected in

the fifties on some myths of French life. The preface to the first edition of *Mythologies* describes my position with troubling accuracy given it was written over sixty years ago: “the starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the 'naturalness' with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by History” (Barthes, 1972: 10). He goes on to write resentfully about “seeing Nature and History confused at every turn” and about wanting to “track down, in the decorative display of what-goes-without-saying, the ideological abuse which, in my view, is hidden there”(ibid). And later in *Myth Today* he delivers the promised end, the consequences of these decorative displays reflecting sombrely that “myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts… it organises a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth” (Barthes 1972: 143).

All of our projects are directed towards the fostering of these kinds of positions or creating opposition and challenge to the myths of education around subject disciplines (Doing Text)[4], classroom management (in Robinson, 2019)[8], academic ritual (New Mythologies)[3], teacher autonomy (Identity and Resistance)[5-7] and assessment (work with Victoria Wright)[9]. My next project with Rob Smith is entitled *The Murder of English*., an attempt to test Barthes’ advice that “the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and to produce an artificial myth: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology” (Barthes, 1972: 134). These projects are not academic exercises, their aim is to be educative acts and interventions. This is why *Barthes New Mythologies* finds itself at a key moment in a PhD submission in Education because the Barthes it reimagines is the one I celebrate in the book’s last sentence (after Sontag): “the great public teacher” (Bennett , 2013: 166).

Teaching as thinking in an open genre

"Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of her sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous, slavish shore?" (Melville: Moby Dick)

Writing here alongside a body of published work that in my first edit was 140,000 words I understand with brutal simplicity the challenge implicit in Peim's explication that "Research implies production or the creation (invention/ discovery?) of new knowledge" (2018: 30). Barthes not only provides a prototype, the mythologist (if there ever is one) that unraveller of assumptions, he who might 'mythify the myth' (Barthes, 1972: 157), but also has suggestions for how we mighty go about our teacherly business. In his inaugural lecture, he offers the notion of "loosening, baffling or at the very least, of lightening" the power that teaching inevitability contains, in "presenting a discourse without imposing it" (in Sontag, 1993; 476). Barthes' model here is "digression, or to put it in a preciously ambiguous word, excursion"(ibid). The equivalent offered to writers is 'fragmentation' which I see at the very least as a useful option, not least because this work is at the very least a series of parts (and 'series' in itself is a loaded term). The work here referenced clearly exists firstly as a sequence of publishing events and at that level 'builds' but the relationship between these parts is not only complex and various (and inevitably in the simplest sense compromised by factors such as 'opportunity') but also subject to a variety of readings in both the specificity and fullness of time.

This is perhaps also the best account, because most precise (there are many others), of the working premise of the material collected here, both the published work which seeks to explore, advocate and demonstrate this approach and this commentary which is also trying to provide access to all of this. All those theorists and practitioners co-opted here are co-opted, usually because they are already there in some form or other. This means that the key theorists acknowledged here will mostly also feature with more specific focus.

I stand with Rancière on the matter of 'instruction' as "a radical point of departure" and his assertion that things go wrong precisely when "it is not a matter of telling and interpreting, but of explaining and understanding" (Rancière, 2010: 4). Much in my committed career as a teacher makes more sense in the context of Rancière's further assertion that "For children and common minds there are stories, for rational beings there are reasons" and also that "inequality is no more a given to be transformed by knowledge than equality is an end to be transformed through knowledge" (ibid). Here myth is displaced by precision: equality is now or it is not.

This 'presentation of a discourse' also best reflects the envisioned possibilities for research in education informed by postmodernism, post-structuralism and deconstruction which Stronach and MacLure (1998) promise in their provocatively titled sourcebook *Educational Research Undone*. It is the intention of this commentary also to "practise this kind of infidelity to educational research" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 4). That infidelity begins with an unwillingness to even construct an approach, preferring sensibilities that are 'relaxed into', an engagement with experience that has no rules. This means a starting point which is "neither the commencement of a battle nor an announcement of a wedding" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 10). Their modest proposal aims to "stick with the verb in its intransitive form

and simply to 'engage'" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998;). Their definition of this verb stands extraction:

"To take part without knowing in advance, how things will turn out, or what have been the terms on which the engagement has been struck, or even who stands on what ground". (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 11)

This is an approach memorably encapsulated by writer Stephen Moffat and delivered by that much-altered Gallifreyan time traveller, The Doctor, as : "I try never to understand. It's called keeping an open mind". However, as Stronach & MacLure explore, 'keeping an open mind' is a tricky business. They pitch their exploration as a "collection of re-iterated openings", indeed the collection is prefixed by Derrida's exhortation that "Deconstruction, if such a thing exists, should open up" (Derrida in Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 1) Interestingly, Barthes is equally tentative about the existence of the mythologist. Having discovered Stronach & MacLure after completing and publishing a body of work, I find nevertheless that I have in my various collaborations unwittingly committed to the project, or denial of one, which they advocate or at least insinuate. I recognise, for example in my own work that one "organising principle or unifying thread" resides in a "persistent practicality: a desire to put deconstruction to work or at least to bring it to bear in the mundane business of doing educational research" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 2) There is also a recognition of Derrida's intentional paradox, that "the 'space' that is opened is actually, or also a dislocation, a denial of the spaces that insulate the disciplines and fields from one another" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 4).

Stronach & MacLure focus on Derrida's insistence on "the necessity of 'departure' as part of the deconstructive act" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 3). For Derrida deconstruction is 'exorbitant', "an attempt to get out of the orbit, to reach the point of a certain exteriority in relation to the space that is protected, closed off by disciplinary institutions" (Derrida, 1976; 162 in Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 3). In their tellingly fragmented, even episodic, first chapter described both tentatively and precisely as '…Openings…' Stronach & MacLure embark on their mission to open up space which must be *de facto* "located within a pre-existing highly complicated space […] a loophole that is precisely not a hole within its own borders, but a kind of pocket secreted within the old sense of borders" (Wigley in Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 12). Much of the work assembled here, particularly and perhaps most explicitly where we purported to 're-imagine' a previous theoretical intervention (for example, in *Barthes' New Mythologies*) seems to embody this notion of loopholes and pockets.

In this commentary, the use of theory is a largely conscious act of infidelity at least to mainstream educational theory and research. For, like Derrida and Peim I am keen for theory "to provide a hermeneutic lever or aggravation" particularly in the face of the entrenched positions that disciplinary authorities have created, since "practices that are strongly embedded and taken for granted may seem to be natural" (Peim, 2018; 45). This is, of course the distortion, which so enraged Barthes and which he labelled 'myth' and Peim sees resistance to theory as part of the ideological 'feint' that keeps this distortion in place (Peim, 2018; 45)'

Here is the opportunity for the introduction of theory as one form of disruption, impurity and anomaly into a system where in Barthes' memorable phrase 'things lose the memory that

they once were made" (Barthes, 1972; 142). In simple terms, these are the unchallenged myths of contemporary education which assume that knowledge can be transferred and learning can be objectified. Like Derrida, our theories of choice are most often literary and cultural. As Stronach and MacLure point out, "it is precisely the impurity of literary theory that for Derrida constitutes its power to question fences erected around others" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998; 12). A key text here is Derrida's *Law of Genre*, which I consider an ur-work of post-structuralism with its insistence on 'participation without belonging' and that "Madness is law, the law is mad-ness. (Derrida, 1980: 81). My work on genre after the media cites this "elliptical, irreverent and at times darkly ironic 'account of an accountless account'" as "a welcome provocation in a critical region that seems sometimes overrun with complacency and insularity (ibid.: 59)". Stronach and MacLure also reference Donna Harraway's 'eccentric figures', such as the cyborg, addressed in Episode 9, as creations also intended "to frustrate the legislative and discriminative programme of humanism" (Stronach & MacLure, 1998;5).

<u>The play's the thing</u>

"Go play boy, play. Your mother plays and I play too" (Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale)*

For Peim "Deconstruction teaches that neither philosophy nor thinking is over and done with" and that "thinking is, as deconstruction clearly demonstrates, interminable" (Peim, 2018; 216). However, lest this should seem unnecessarily academic, Peim also insists that most importantly "Deconstruction is what puts 'play' into play" (Peim, 2018; 142) and this element is vital to understanding my own work, built as it is on anachronism, playfulness and instinctiveness. Hence 'play' is a first principle, not a supplementary technique, thus Derrida:

Play is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Play is always play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around. (Derrida, 1978: 292)

For Peim, “The history of philosophy, from a perspective of deconstruction, is the history of partial answers, partial solutions, partial insights and explorations into those issues that remain live for us in all our present efforts to wrestle with knowledge and its production as researchers” (Peim, 2018; 5) This puts the researcher front and central and with this ‘subjectivity’ and ‘agency’, “the transformation of the self at the level of knowledge” and “the deconstruction of the false division between the objective and the subjective” (Peim, 2018; 21). Peim also invokes Derrida’s notion of the spectre to articulate the idea of “the present being haunted by the spectral past”, a particularly telling notion if applied to the study of pedagogical practice wherein the pedagogical past often seems to signify “something incomplete, unfinished and, therefore, perhaps in a curious way, something that, although past, is yet to come” (Peim, 2018; 79). It is not difficult to identify in my own work “a restless presence, both haunting and haunted, but also an absence or gap” centred around notions of emancipatory or progressive pedagogies (Peim, 2018; 80). Peim suggests we might imagine “this space of incompleteness as the space of the quest for knowledge, or research” since “The spectre forces us to rethink our assumptions about present realities” (ibid). Hopefully this productive restlessness is present both here and in the work to which it refers.

This playful, but edgy incompleteness, brings in the final formative influence on both the shape of this commentary and indeed of my work (and the subject of my Masters dissertation 35 years ago): the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht. Incidentally, It is my belief that Brecht is in fact the prototype for Barthes' mythologist: Barthes was promoting Brecht's work in France at the time of writing *Mythologies*. Walter Hinck (1997) in his classic study of Brecht (*Die Dramaturgie des späten Brechts*) writes of Brecht needing his art to have a 'particular social function' ("eine bestimmte gesellschaftliche Funktion") and a desire to find solutions to problems, to be useful. These solutions though were always provisional and capable of improvement. Hinck writes that "a solution is sought but only in the unfinished, tentative sense of a provisional solution" ("wird eine Erlösung erwartet, aber doch nur im unfertigen, unbeschlossenen Sinne einer Auslösung"). This is also the tenor of my project and why issues are returned to again and again and it is Brecht's influence that informs the structure of this commentary which his influence has urged me to describe as 'episodic'. As the Dramaturg (advisor on theatre) points out in Brecht's drama of theories *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, Brecht "cuts his plays up into a series of little independent playlets so that the action progresses by jumps" (Brecht, 1965; 75). Thus, for Brecht the analysis of a play consists firstly finding out "what socially valuable insights and impulses the play offers" and then examining "the relationship of the episodes, their construction" (in Willet, 1964; 240-41). This seems at least a reasonable model for the intellectual, pedagogical and academic 'plays' presented here. And that sense of critical is further extended with reference to Brecht's most substantial theoretical work, *A Short Organon for the Theatre* which suggests that if the episodes are firstly played simply one after another:

"Then the story unreels in a contradictory manner; the individual scenes retain their own meaning; they yield and stimulate a wealth of ideas; and their sum, the story, unfolds authentically without any cheap all-pervading idealization (one word leading to another) or directing of subordinate purely functional component parts to an ending in which everything is resolved" (in Willet, 1964; 279)

I think this story/commentary also 'unreels in a contradictory manner' and it is my intention to allow the individual scenes to "retain their own meaning" hopefully in a way that will "stimulate a wealth of ideas". The technique in much of this work also owes a couple of debts to Brecht in both its form and function. Brecht's deployment of V-effects (*Verfremdungseffekte*) to set critical distance between the theatre audience and what was being presented on stage is essentially a mythological approach. It creates myths, consciously wrought but also transparent and available for examination. For Brecht this is a matter of form and content allowing the intended disruptions to be structural, textural, linguistic and narrative. Much of the writing referred to here also plays with the disruption of the text for some fine purpose and, as with Brecht, that purpose is educational: something is there to be 'taught' and 'learnt' (his early plays were called *Lehrstucke* 'teaching pieces'). Brecht thought of the theatre as a laboratory within which pressing political and social issues could be addressed but also where solutions might be found.

However, it must be pointed out that the episodic structure used here is an organising device such that the episodes proper are not only the published works but more tellingly the constituent parts of the development of a coherent ethical praxis. This work will create (as far as possible) a coherent commentary, drawing together these quite different projects. The selection of work is presented and 'glossed' chronologically not to suggest a coherent

development but merely to record the sense that each new attempt was at least conscious of those which came earlier. That process begins with a consideration of *After the* Media in Episode 2.

Although I can openly restate my delight at perpetual production, I feel too the wisdom of Eliot's patient restatement of the larger project:

"There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business." (T.S. Eliot, *The Four Quartets*)

2

WHY *AFTER THE MEDIA* REPRESENTS A VIABLE STARTING POINT IF NOT CONSCIOUSLY SO

> "How to write, given all the snares set by the collective image of the work?—Why, *blindly.* At every moment of the effort, lost bewildered and driven." (Barthes, 2020; 85)

This episode attempts to establish our 2011 publication *After the Media* (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011) as the foundation of these explorations and of the approach that has been subsequently taken and the influence, particularly of Barthes, in this transition to a model of writing presented in the previous episode that is central to both this commentary and indeed the work it references.

It is also a long term project. As an undergraduate and then a postgraduate student, I wrote dissertations entitled 'Art against Ideology' and 'Ideology against Art' respectively, prompted by Ernst Fischer's work. Both of these were centrally concerned with the ways in which the dialectic might be kept in motion in the face of various kinds of friction using art (and Brecht's art in particular) as an efficient form of lubrication. Old habits perhaps die hard because on re-examination I find that this endeavour is also central to all considered here. In this Barthes becomes increasingly important, not least because he perhaps most effectively articulated the challenge, declaring that all language is "quite simply fascist" (Barthes, 2005). Michael Wood explores this in his essay *French Lessons* (2015), which firstly decides to explore the possibility that Barthes might have "meant exactly what he said" and then places this in the context of French writing and philosophy. Wood uses Badiou to establish how in the French language "the installation of thought […] is political from the

start, a matter of democratizing discussion" but also that "the project is literary as well as political"(Wood, 2015: 6). For Badiou, "French philosophers want to write and write for everyone", an instinct that the work considered here also shares, as it does "the longing for a clean, universal view" (Wood, 2015; 7).

Interestingly, Wood explicitly locates this democratic discussion "beyond the academy" though conceding that this implies a "style of argument: seduction and skirmish rather than truth and conviction". It is also about "No repentance, no uncertainty […] just persuading an assembly of some sort to vote" (Wood, 2015: 8). This characterises the projects collected here, accumulating not only evidence but also political intent. It also inevitably creates a relationship with the languages in which it travels since, as Barthes himself points out: "the performance of a language system (la langue, comme performance de tout language) – is neither reactionary nor progressive"(cited in Wood, 2015: 10). It is, as we learnt earlier, 'fascist' but precisely not in the sense that it prevents or impedes but rather because "it compels speech" (cited in Wood, 2015: 9).

This calling down of speech is tempered by a certain kind of semantic danger: "in each sign sleeps that monster: a stereotype" (Wood, 2015; 10). Barthes wrote of semiotics as a science to study the production of stereotypes, while Nietzsche warned that the truth was nothing more than "the solidification of old metaphor"(in Sontag, 1993: 406) .

After the Media (2012), our first book-length intervention in the theory and practice of education, which is the focus of this episode, was pitched as follows:

"This provocative text considers the state of media and cultural studies today after the demolition of the traditional media paradigm, and engages with the new, active consumer culture.

Media Studies, particularly within schools, has until recently been concerned with mass media and the effects of 'the media' in society and on people. As new media technology has blurred the boundaries between the audience and the media, the status of this area of education is threatened. Whilst some have called for a drastic rethink (Media Studies 2.0), others have called for caution, arguing that the power dynamics of ownership and gatekeeping are left intact.

This book uses cultural and technological change as a context for a more forensic exploration of the traditional dependence on the idea of 'the media' as one homogenous unit. It suggests that it would be liberating for students, teachers and academics to depart from such a model and shift the focus to people and how they create culture in this contemporary 'mediascape'."

After the Media was our first large scale attempt to address these problems, these issues and because we were clearly "neither knights of faith nor superman" we too gravitated towards what Barthes calls "salutary trickery, this evasion, this grand imposture which allows us to understand speech outside the bounds of power" (cited in Wood, 2015: 10). And as Wood points out, "Barthes gives this trickery, this lure, the name of writing, écriture" (Wood, 2015: 10).

In establishing a form of writing and a rationale for this form that is properly speculative and exploratory, Barthes is an essential source. As Wood puts it "We need to be awakened to the truth anew and just telling us the truth won't do this" (Wood, 2015: 11): showing always trumps mere being. Wood cites Barthes decisively:

"I have always wanted to argue with my moods; not to justify them; still less to fill the scene of the text with my individuality; but on the contrary, to offer, to extend this individuality to a science of the subject, a science whose name is of little importance to me." (cited in Wood, 2015: 11)

Rethinking the Subject

"And so we seek to reformulate the study of culture and identity without recourse to any notion of 'the media' as a stable construct" (Bennett, Kendall and Macdougall, 2011: 7).

This is not about resolution but rather about endless production. For Wood, "An argument is a discussion, a quarrel, a summary, a gist, a plot, a thesis, a set of reasons, and much more" (Wood, 2015: 11): there is no victory for the arguers nor end to the arguments and style is part of the meaning. The absence of resolution is clearly a conscious position which requires us all to decide what we will take from any intervention: "The thing is to start knowing and to do something with our knowledge" (Wood, 2015: 14). This chimes with Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster who is "for another means of knowledge" but "not transmitting of knowledge" (Rancière, 2010: 2) . This manifesto is taken up by Andy Stafford in his consideration of Barthes as "in the final instance […] a dialectician" in the face of the non-dialectical nature of language (Stafford, 2017: 97).

Stafford establishes a position which provides a useful gloss on our own attempts from *After the Media* onwards using Barthes's reworking of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud. Here

Rimbaud's famous declaration, "we must be completely modern" ('Il faut être absolument moderne') becomes "we must be dialectical" ('Il faut être dialectique) (Stafford, 2017: 97). The passage is important for understanding the limitations and opportunities afforded by a model of writing as research since language can only say 'we must be dialectical', "but cannot be so itself: language is a representation without perspective, except precisely for the author's; but the author dialecticizes himself, he does not dialecticize the world" (Stafford, 2017:97) .

Stafford usefully suggests that "it is the position, the positioning, of the person analysing the outside world that counts for more than the objective nature of that outside world" (Stafford, 2017: 97). These positionings are vital to our writing projects which are invitations to positions negotiated between convenors and participants (even when these are the same people) and then between participants and the rainy, stony world. And always with the understanding that 'The study of myth leads us to contradictory findings.' (Lévi-Strauss in Stafford, 2017: 103). And literally in writing this I discover, or at least realise, that *After the Media* is properly a study of myths. Our hypothesis here is that "the institutionalised practices of teaching about popular culture must be understood as a technology for the naturalisation of specific reading and writing practices, particular ways of making meaning and understanding the world which are far from neutral" (Bennett et al., 2011: 4) . And this is to understand that the paraphernalia of Subject Media, and other related critical disciplines; genre, ideology, representation and all the rest are properly myths in the Barthesian sense. In addition, what the book presents as demystification is further proof that "every mythology is the palpable surface of human alienation" (Stafford, 2017: 104).

And if it is true for the objects of study traversed by ten years of writing endeavour, it must be true when the medium becomes the message:

"The object of study is never given without its contradictory attributes, is only ever defined as a meeting-point [croisement], and which is falsely symmetrical, of a number of terms (this is the ancient notion of chiasma), whereby rhetoric becomes a veritable dialectical instrument; this is because only form is able, in the final instance, to correct the inability of language to make sense of the object's movement, of its alternating [contrariété] and generally of its other logic" (Barthes cited in Stafford, 2017: 107).

Promising a new start

"In that year there was an intense visitation of energy" (Jim Morrison)

After the Media represents an appropriate starting point for this 'record of travel' because it was the first opportunity we had as academics to write at book length, openly and speculatively. As such, this commentary allows an opportunity to retrospectively set the work in its contexts. Partly as a result of this we gave ourselves a broad specification to write a manifesto of sorts:

"In this book we offer an extended deconstruction of what we call subject media – the institutionalised framing of the study of popular culture – and we argue that new media and technology do not provide in themselves a paradigm shift that necessitates new kinds of pedagogy" (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 1).

The elements here include the ‘deconstruction’ explicit in Peim’s case for returning thinking to the very centre of educational research, that deconstruction that “for Derrida, following Heidegger, means a restless commitment to thinking” (Peim, 2018; 50). And this ‘restless commitment’ finds its first target in a still-existing complacency over the potential of ‘new’ media or a so-called ‘Digital Age’ to predicate some kind of progressive or emancipatory pedagogy. Education remains incredibly resistant to the apparently democratizing or indeed liberating impact of the then newly contracted/corrupted identity ‘prosumer’ (producer AND consumer): you show me yours, I’ll show you mine!. We were writing then, and still do, as doubters not believers but always determined nevertheless to get past this *impasse*:

“Instead we suggest that in fragmenting the idea of ‘the media’ as a construct, an object of study or an employment sector, these new digital media have simply opened our eyes to the always-already dubious nature of that idea. So we take Gauntlett’s (2008) assertion that media studies has been too concerned with ‘the media’, paying scarce attention to people, and we extend that idea in relation to the broader orthodoxy of media education”.
(Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 1)

In this we are concerned already, although this would become much clearer later, to baffle pedagogical logic which is to “explain that which would not be understood, if it were not explained” in order to “demonstrate an incapacity” (Rancière,2010: 2). Thus, we have the parade of key myths, each “a key concept from the discipline, as we see it evolving into a ‘vertical discourse’ (Bernstein, 1990)” (*ibid*.). In this way we confirm Rancière’s notion that “Its topography is that of top to bottom, from surface to depth” (Rancière, 2010: 4). The search for and creation of flattened hierarchies becomes a central theme and intention in

time but first there is a need to change the paradigms. This must begin with the monolithic Subject Media which will in the fullness of time stand for all subject disciplines as technologies of subjection, producing that telling combination of docility and productivity. Even in a subject invented to legitimize the study of the ephemera of popular culture, “we observe, even within such hybridity, the preservation of an unhelpful set of precepts for media education which we call Subject Media” (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 2). The problem here is obvious:

“ These consist of the construction of ‘the media’ as a ‘Big Other’ (Zizek, 1999) to be at once looked at ‘critically’ and desired as a destination (for employment); the sovereign nature of the text – inherited from the socio-cultural framing of English teaching and the confining of empirical engagement with people (in their situated weaving of media activity into their everyday lives and the performance of identities) and the maintenance of a modernist conception of representation that ultimately serves to undermine the ‘emancipatory’ spirit of the (ideal) subject.”(ibid.)

On the other hand, “The incomplete project we must press on with requires the removal of ‘the media’ from the equation”. Initially we are concerned to clear space for a debate which will ultimately allow a new dispensation to be proposed which we label, a ‘pedagogy of the inexpert’. This is a matter largely of finding one set of starting points (which are critical/ analytical) in order to prepare the ground for a second set of starting points “for the study of culture and identity after the media, engaging with questions of narrative, audience and technology while avoiding the conceit of ‘knowing’” (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 14). These are essentially explorations of what Rancière calls ‘pedagogical reasoning’, a premise constructed by “discourses of schooling and formal education rather than by

notions of what can be known in the world" (Rancière, 2010: 14). In such a context "Subjects as academic disciplines are produced by contingent cultural practices as forms of identity, knowledge and legitimation" (op. cit.: 17). Here, "Subject media is a technology and a discourse constructed from and framed by its entire history, and in particular the inherent tensions between its 'spirit' (a sort of Barthesian myth constructed by its participant community) and its 'word', how it performs itself (being taught, assessed and managed)" (*ibid.*). The principal issue is necessarily power since "This discourse is necessarily concerned with the exercise of power both within and beyond its formulations which relate to not only the status of the subject but also its proposed and performed content and its project of emancipation and empowerment of learners") (ibid.). In this way the challenge is Barthes' notion of baffling, lightening or otherwise undermining this power "which can only be really embodied not by embodying significant contradictions, but rather by making these competing discourses a central object of study (Fraser, 1990)" (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 17).

This project now seems entirely in keeping with Rancière's notion of Universal Teaching since it is concerned to explore "the dynamics of an increasingly participatory culture where power and resistance are continually negotiating spaces wherein new dispensations can be formulated" and to consider whether we can "genuinely hope to find space for an emancipatory pedagogy" (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 18). This emancipatory pedagogy is predicated on the rejection by disruption of a dominant discourse which is vertical (top to bottom). Rancière sees the opposition principally as 'instruction', the epitome of the traditional, here stereotypical, teaching act. He sees this darkly as "a radical point of departure, or a new birth, as soon as it is not a matter of telling and interpreting,

but of explaining and understanding" (Rancière, 2010: 4). This is more uncompromising but also significantly clearer than *After the Media* can manage at this point. We have clues but they are broader:

To a woman with broadband, everything looks like a social network. It is this shift of intellectual cargo that provides us with things to explore. Whereas all the other models lead to a new point of focus, this shift is of the focus itself. Suddenly this feels like an act of emancipation rather than appropriation, a restoration of something essential" (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 20).

Rancière, on the other hand is unflinching; "If explanation is in principle infinite, it is because its primary function is to infinitize the very distance it proposes to reduce" (Rancière, 2010: 4). He also offers an unwitting critique of our approach, offering stories in preference to reasons. There is certainly an explicit statement of intent in our ambitious manifesto but also at times we do protest too much. For example we argue that "In embracing the 'inexpert' we better maintain 'expertise'." and then in the next sentence make clear that "Authority is not to be abandoned or anarchy embraced" (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 22). If the proof of the pudding is to be found in the eating, then it has to be admitted that the loosening of authority, particular academically, proved something of an issue in a context where we ourselves perhaps felt we had something to prove.

Learning our Lessons

“It’s blood we want, not bloody cleverness” (attributed to Wordsworth)

Though the book received supportive and generally positive reviews, there is always an understanding that describing a project as ‘ambitious’ effectively means it partly or substantially has not delivered. So too perhaps the qualifiers ‘vital’ and ‘passionate’:

'A timely, vital, and passionate challenge to the institutions of media teaching, this book argues that many tenets of cultural studies have all-too-often gone missing here. Focusing on today's media students and their favoured texts, technologies, and fandoms, the authors inspire a people-centred rather than text-centred approach. The end result? You might just think differently about media studies after After the Media.' (Matt Hills, Cardiff University, UK)

Liz Roberts, in the *Media Education Journal* offered exactly the endorsement we were looking for, suggesting that **“**the content may be weighty and the arguments academic but it is also very readable, being enlivened with apt and entertaining quotations from both poets and theorists […] what is most impressive is the mix of erudition and enthusiasm, the view of change as opportunity, as liberation not threat, the focus on people and students.” Here is the medium and the message but had this been the case, there would have been little to learn. Better to say, that these were our aspirations and continue to be so.

A fairer and more useful evaluation was provided by Professor Rodriguez-Amat in the *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics.* While advocating the book as “recommendable for any reader who does not feel comfortable with the old theories of

media literacy and media effects under the current conditions of remixed popular self-produced culturescapes – in particular, those who always wanted to know a little more about media culture and never dared to ask", Rodriguez-Amat also recognises the central challenge and flaw that "After the Media is a mash up of both, theories and conditions, in one single volume".

However the most telling response of all came in the *European Journal of Communication*, which completely understood and appreciated our arguments, offering them back with great clarity:

> "Their polemical intent in this is that there should be greater recognition of the need for our focus to be far wider, on everyday social life and the ways in which various cultural products are interwoven with it, mediate it and in certain ways connect with it. Media studies itself, and especially in its more textualist modes, is too narrow, too circumscribed by simply taking 'the media' as its object(s) of study.
>
> This is only partly what Bennett, Kendall and McDougall are arguing, for in addition to this they see 'media' as an artificial construct, similar to canonical literature in English studies, endorsing a normative discourse which insulates attention to the media text from the theorizing of everyday life and obstructs thinking about culture and identity in new ways. What they mean by 'after' in the title of their book is therefore not a temporal shift, heralded by some putative 'prosumer', for of course media continue to exist; and what they seek to provoke is not a paradigm shift, as if a whole new way of seeing is required. What they are *after* is refusal to separate media off from everything else, refusal to see 'the media' as monolithic or all-powerful, and refusal to pander to text-centrism."

However, they were uncompromising in their critique of the 'register' and mode of address, memorably criticising the authors for "interlarding" the text with too much allusion:

"Unfortunately, Bennett, Kendall and McDougall undermine their purpose by relying excessively and uncritically on existing cultural theory, particularly that informed by poststructuralism, without properly showing its relevance. Somewhat paradoxically, they fly in the face of their pedagogy of the inexpert by interlarding their text with so many knowing references and quotations that are not adequately integrated into their own discussion. There are also inconsistencies and contradictions, as for example when they claim to oppose epochalist thinking but then declare with confidence that 'we are heading into a new era' (p. 98), which might lead the reader to think they have acquired the ultimate expertise, that of knowing the future."

Ambition also often means that too much has been attempted, that next time it must be done differently. The challenge of the multi-function text with a complement also of different audiences is to have an impact broad enough to allow for the next level of argument to employ discrete approaches particularly in terms of theory and practice. This is the lesson I learnt to some extent and the next two book projects were more consciously 'about' theory (*Barthes' Mythologies* Today) and practice (*Doing Text: Using media after the subject*) respectively. Other writers/intellectuals/ teachers were enlisted in each case as writers rather than academics in cases where these things were incompatible (and not only because some of them were not academics). Though Professor McDougall and I acted as editors in

both cases, neither of these was in any conventional sense an edited collection (c.f. Episodes 3 and 4). They were writing projects, concerned as much with 'fancy' as with 'fact'.

In all of this *After the Media* features and functions as a kind of spawning pool, teaming with a kind of inconsistent energy which pulses out across the subsequent work, which in its turn returns, at least as a gesture, to the motherlode. A brief examination of the extracts provided, for example from the chapter on genre is enough to appreciate the viscosity of the material, which is heavily theoretical and anchored to an exemplification through popular cultural texts. Seeking an audience of teachers as much as academics, this chapter explicitly "constitutes our attempts to suggest how genre may be reconceptualised in a media studies operating 'after the media'" (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall: 2011: 39). However, choosing to address this via a 'Derridean tour de force which seeks (darkly) 'to make light of all the tranquil categories of genre theory' and performs its theme by 'putting to death the very thing it engenders' (Derrida, 1980)" (ibid,) seems now to have missed the appropriate register. So too this: "Here in the 'blink of an eye', in the fragile transience of the hymen we encounter the redemptive feminine challenging the opposition of the laws of nature and history imposed by phallocentrism: replacing 'the law' with 'la loi' (in French 'the law' is feminine)" (ibid) . It will be interesting nearly a decade after this was published to see whether my latest three hander, *The Uses of Media Literacy* (2020), compares because, as this commentary will endeavor to evidence, these two books are very much the base camp and latest staging post of my ongoing project.

There is much in *After the Media* that has been reused and developed elsewhere, material for the *bricoleur* certainly. Here it is about returning the focus to the cultural contexts in which media products are consumed, attempts to rejuvenate genre as a useful but tired aspect of the theoretical framework. Derrida offers "the experience of genre as

‘participation without belonging’, an act that carries with it the inherent dangers of impurity, anomaly and monstrosity” (Derrida, 1980:65) but not everyone was or indeed is ready for that. Although we called for textual adventurers, in retrospect the more important work was to render genre as “‘discursive practices’, designed partly to ‘upset their taxonomic certainties’ but also to ‘summon up these classifications so that ‘laws’ themselves can be examined” (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 39). Mittell is used to hammer this home: “analysing genres must consider the processes and practices of categorisation, not just the elements which fall under categorical rubric (2004: xiv)” (Bennett, Kendall & McDougall, 2011: 40). This may with hindsight be a little more attainable than a “genuine ‘jouissance’”. However, what we’d gained was confidence and momentum, which would furnish us with the ambition, or perhaps gall, to take on the author-god Barthes, whose reimagining is the subject of Episode 3.

3

WHERE BARTHES IS CELEBRATED, CHALLENGED AND ULTIMATELY RE-IMAGINED AND IN WHICH ATTEMPTS ARE MADE TO MAKE KNOWLEDGE FESTIVE AND AT LEAST FIVE DIFFICULTIES ARE ENCOUNTERED IN TRYING TO WRITE THE TRUTH.

"Re-reading mythologies while working on the expanded English edition last year brought home to me why the text is still relevant: while much separates the 1950s from the present, Western culture remains riddled with appeals to 'common sense' and 'human nature'. Myth endures. But a euphoric alternative rages in *Mythologies*." (Badmington, 2010)

'…to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties' (Brecht, 1966).

If *After the Media* had put down a foundation for a kind of career in writing actively and energetically but also increasingly purposefully about 'the teaching thing' and 'the learning thing', then the recasting of Barthes marks the significant transition of approach and method. At some level an act of great impudence (ambition should be made of sterner stuff), it gathered together a collection of Cultural/ Media Studies 'notables' (van Zoonen, Hills, Petley, Stafford, Wall, Brooker) more than ably supported by an array of enthusiastic cultural commentators and dared to take up Barthes's implicit invitation to update in his preface to the 1970 edition. Barthes explains "why I have made no attempt to bring it up to date" and it is "not because what brought them about has now disappeared" (Barthes, 1972: 8). Rather it is with the conviction, extended, more than 40 years later, that both "ideological criticism"

and “semiological analysis” have become “more precise, complicated and differentiated” (ibid). Moreover, Barthes argues, and in my writing this is key, “it has become the theoretical locus wherein a certain liberation of 'the significant', in our country and in the West, may well be enacted” (ibid).

Barthes’ Mythologies Today: Readings of Contemporary Culture (Bennett and McDougall, 2013) was a project to remake *Mythologies* maintaining the parameters of Barthes’ original English edition (in terms of both wordage and number of contributors). Its pitch remains as follows:

This is Barthes’ seminal text reimagined in a contemporary context by contemporary academics. Through a revisiting of *Mythologies*, a key text in cultural and media studies, this volume explores the value these disciplines can add to an understanding of contemporary society and culture. Leading academics in media, English, education, and cultural studies here are tasked with identifying the "new mythologies" some fifty or so years on from Barthes’ original interventions. The contributions in this volume, are readings of contemporary culture, each engaging with a cultural event, practice, or text as mythological. These readings are then contextualized by an introduction which reflects on the ‘how’ of these engaging responses and an "essay at the back of the book" which replaces Barthes’ concluding Myth Today with a reflection on the contemporary provenance of both Barthes and his most famous book. Thus the book is at least two things at once whichever way you look: a ‘new’ *Mythologies* and a book about Barthes’ legacy; an exploration of the place of theory in critical writing, and a book about contemporary culture.

In some ways the best account of the challenge we had taken on is contained within the most impudent part of the project, my unapologetic attempt to deliver on our promise (to Routledge at least) of "a full-blown critical essay that would revisit/renew/update/develop, Barthes's powerhouse contribution 'Myth Today' (i.e. *Myth Aujourd'hui'*)" (Bennett & McDougall, 2013: 147). This was not made any more manageable by my immediate evocation of Barthes himself calling for 'the subjective grasp of history in which the potent seed of the future is nothing but the most profound apocalypse of the present' (Barthes, 1972: 158). This was kill or cure: thankfully the latter because time spent with Barthes is wonderfully restorative.

More Questions than Answers

"The significance of ontology, or of the ontological dimension, resides in its fundamental nature" (Peim, 2018: 27).

One of the premises of the project was to ask a set of questions, principally: "What is a myth today? What constitutes theory? And who has the authority to impose a theory on myth?" (Bennett & McDougall, 2013:3) with the expectation that we would confirm the value of a certain kind of attitude to a certain kind of theory. With hindsight, it is easy to see this as an aspect of the argument that was later articulated by Peim (another *Barthes Mythologies Today* contributor) that sometimes theory is required if surfaces are to be negotiated (Peim, 2018: 38). Here there is a conscious "re-imagining of a canonical text, one which John Storey described as 'one of the founding texts of cultural studies (Storey, 2009: 242)" (Bennett 2012:

147), which gives the whole project a sense of occasion as “Barthes, the ‘author-god’ was the whole issue of theory and its practice in academic and critical contexts” (ibid).

What also went into the writing of *Barthes’ Myth Today* was an interim report we gave in the form of a paper presented to the international ‘Crossroads in Cultural Studies’ conference which happened in 2012 to be at the Sorbonne of all places. Presenting a paper on Barthes within sight of the Eiffel Tower he so deftly ‘deconstructed’, “This pure- virtually empty - sign - is ineluctable because it means everything” (in Bennett & McDougall, 2013: 145) was an event in the way that reimagining *Mythologies* was probably meant to be, complicated by that whiff of celebrity that Morrissey writing in better times warned leads us headlong into harm. While there, Professor MacDougall and I both bought copies in the original French of *Mythologies* complete with the emblematic Citroen cover, which neither us are ever going to read: pure(ly) symbolic objects.

Looking back this ‘sense of occasion’ is neither marginal nor decorative. In Paris I explored, as later in the book, the Barthes myth but also compared Barthes and the tower I could see from the window: ‘no glance he fails to touch’ (Bennett, 2013: 146). Later I explained, when writing it, that “this project, to extend the analogy, simply takes Barthes’ advice on the subject of the “tower” and applies it to Barthes himself: “you must… get up on it and, so to speak, identify yourself with it” (ibid) . The abstract to the paper we subsequently published claimed to present “a theoretical evaluation in practice, in the form of a project whereby Barthes’ collections of *Mythologies* (1973, 1979) were ‘reimagined’ by academics, teachers and students from (and for) the contemporary arts and media / culture landscape” (Bennett & McDougall, 2016a: 55). Part of the “discursive and pedagogic conflict” attempted is predicated on the composition of the two participant groups: “self-identified published ‘experts’ from the field of art, media and cultural studies and groups of ‘inexpert’ student /

teacher collaboration, both working to the same 'brief' but in different contexts" (ibid). Re-examining the evidence with the advantage of hindsight, I can see that the central questions considered have continued to be important in my writing (and teaching and thinking): What is a myth today? What constitutes theory? And who has the authority to impose theory on contemporary reality (which the documentary film-maker Alexander Kluge argued could only be represented "as the historical fiction it is" (in Bennett et al, 2006: 214)? This is drawn from a Reader in Film studies I co-edited in the 'zero-zero' decade which also includes the following from the Vietnamese film-maker and literary theorist Trinh T. Minha-ha:

"Truth has to be made vivid, interesting; it has to be dramatized' if it is to convince the audience of the evidence, whose confidence in it allows truth to take shape. *Documentary-the presentation of actual facts in a way that makes them credible and telling to people at the time (William Stott)*" (Bennett et al, 2006: 212)

There is much here which has resonance, for the whole project of writing as research, for Badiou's assertion that all French philosophers really want to be writers and especially for Barthes, whom Sontag treats as a writer and who memorably proclaimed: "Writing makes knowledge festive"(1993: 464)

What ceremony else? Clearly the decision to rewrite Barthes is a conscious performance with inevitable far-reaching consequences for our direction of travel which the article (not published until 2016) partly explicates and otherwise intimates:

“The tension in our work arises from the ‘use’ of a canonical text – *Mythologies*. In other words, what we want to do with theory, and do with Barthes, by problematizing how theory ‘gets done’, nevertheless starts out from a canonical position. In giving authors ‘free rein’ to write a contemporary mythology of any length between the shortest and longest of Barthes’ equivalents, and students the privilege of anonymity, our objective has been to ‘capture’ myth in between and across contexts and discourses. The identities (and stories told implicitly) of our contributors – understanding themselves as academics, writers, students becoming academics, critics, more or less ‘expert’ – frames the presentation and remediation of art and culture in everyday life” (Bennett & McDougall, 2016a: 65)

What I personally derived from the experience was a sense of purpose, a degree of licence and a way of happening (a mouth!), having discovered something important : “What is Barthes today? Barthes is a form of speech, a mode of signification” (Bennett, 2013: 145). In short, for the writer it is “to be defined not by object or material but by a signifying consciousness’” (ibid). I was to be a mythologist (if there ever is one) for whom Barthes predicted “ a few difficulties, in feeling if not in method” (Barthes, 1972: 157). His status “still remains basically one of being excluded”, “His speech is a metalanguage, it 'acts' nothing; at the most, it unveils - or does it?” and “must become estranged (from the entire community) if he wants to liberate the myth” (ibid). Excluded from the world on whose behalf he professes to act, the mythologist’s “connection with the world is of the order of sarcasm” (op. cit.: 157).

Standing in the Hall of Fame

"You took me to a restaurant off Broadway to show me who you are" (Pet Shop Boys, *Rent*)

As I mentioned earlier, it is my opinion that one of Barthes' influences in his explication of the mythologist's job description is Bertolt Brecht, whose work does little else than 'mythify the myths'. Brecht's own set of requirements for the writer of the truth is similarly demanding. His five difficulties (Brecht, 1966) are really prompts for a set of interesting 'qualities':

1. The Courage to Write the Truth

2. The Keenness to Recognize the Truth

3. The Skill to Manipulate the Truth as a Weapon

4. The Judgment to Select Those in Whose Hands the Truth Will Be Effective

5. The Cunning to Spread the Truth Among the Many

Interestingly, my first outing as a mythologist was in response to an invitation by the *Media Education Research Journal* to induct Barthes, and specifically *Mythologies*, into a tentative Media Studies theoretical canon - with mock seriousness which was not quite sarcastic but certainly ironic. This was prompted by the insistence of a board member, Dan Laughey, that Subject Media/ Media Studies would never have a settled identity in the academy until it identified a critical canon on which it could predicate itself. He proposed 'key thinkers' and the MERJ proposed a regular feature wherein some of his proposals were inducted and the idea of the canon itself was problematised. Given the natural resistance of the area to most kinds of canonical authority, it is hard not to see Laughey as something of a

contrarian, always spoiling for a fight and in this persona a somewhat useful contributor to this account of writing as research. He was also a contributor to the Barthes book.

Seeing the canonical as problematic is all very well but deep into a commentary which seems keen to identify key influences, might be a good place to remember the *After The Media* review that concluded: "Unfortunately, Bennett, Kendall and McDougall undermine their purpose by relying excessively and uncritically on existing cultural theory". Even Laughey's notion of a canon based on 'key thinkers' was interested in "not who these people are/were but what contribution they offered to the long tradition of media thought" (http://danlaughey.com). MERJ's starting position was clear: "Whether we agree with Dan's position is another matter, but we are interested in his provocation – that there should, or can, be, a 'canon' for a discipline that has perhaps been viewed by its practitioners as more of a 'horizontal discourse', to use Bernstein's term, or one more resistant to a grand narrative of (with the exception of Stuart Hall, who doesn't make the list but is credited) white male thinking and writing" (MERJ , 2011: 82).

But this was not Laughey's concern and given a platform "to come up with a shortlist of seminal works in the broad field of media, communications and cultural studies – for the newly titled 'Laughey's Canon' section of the journal" (MERJ, 2011: 82), he was only too happy to be forthcoming. What sprang to mind were *Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan, *Television* by Raymond Williams, and *Mythologies* by Roland Barthes and these were immediately allocated 'curators', which is how I was allocated *Mythologies* and with it a sort of citation which read, "These seminal examinations of media and popular culture,

regardless of how long ago they were written, demand respect and attention, stand out from the rest and stand the test of time" (Laughy, 2011: 63).

What I wrote was somewhat different and at least to me both then and now more useful because it concerned both the relationship of Barthes to the ongoing work and the relationship with Barthes as emblematic of the ongoing work. This is also played out in and through my *Barthes after Barthes* finale, which I consider my most ambitious writing project which pursues Barthes with all it has for 'something we can use'. There I co-opted Brecht's imagined epitaph: "He made suggestions. We carried them out". Barthes' mantra is similarly pragmatic: "I can only repeat to myself the words which end Sartre's No Exit: Let's go on" (Barthes in Sontag, 1993: 419). Thus I imagine him uneasy to be in Laughey's cannon, or anybody else's, and as such is especially welcome here in relation to my suspicion of these kinds of authority. A couple of extracts might clarify this:

"It's doubtful whether Barthes would have seen election to a Cultural Studies canon as an achievement. He was dubious enough about the process by which his writing might become his *oeuvre*, which he described as a "move from a contingency of writings to the transcendence of a unitary, sacred product" . "I delight ceaselessly, endlessly," he wrote, "in writing as in a perpetual production, in an unconditional dispersion, in an energy of seduction which no legal defence of the subject I fling upon the page can any longer halt". One of his notions of a 'new linguistic science' is that it would address the solidification of old metaphors', that it would track "the progress of their solidification,

their densification throughout historical discourse". The canon, of course, is just such an 'old metaphor' (Bennett, 2013: 95).

The canon is also a myth par excellence, although frustratingly not one of which either Barthes or our contemporary 'reimaginers' realised the potential. Its existence as a cultural practice, or "signifying consciousness", rather than an object or even an idea marks it out as a suitable case for treatment. Walking through this reading of Barthes' election to the canon may help to put 'the canon' and *Mythologies* in their proper places, historically and ideologically. Barthes presents myth as a second order semiological system, which depends firstly on signification taking place, a sign being produced. This sign then becomes the signifier for a second order transaction wherein meaning becomes form; in Barthes' words, "the meaning leaves its contingency behind: it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains" (Barthes, 1972: 116) . Barthes' now famous example concerns a young Black soldier saluting the *tricolour*, but it might just as well be the 'election' of *Mythologies* to the canon. For Barthes the myth, as form, is "slightly impoverished": the myth is not a purified essence but rather a "formless, unstable, nebulous condensation whose unity and coherence are above all due to its function"(Barthes, 1972: 118). And its function is to be appropriated.

Whatever its origin, the myth works through deformation, thus the "Negro salute" loses its history, is "changed into gesture". So too is the canon, "vitrified into an eternal reference", meant to both represent and embody and doing both and neither . For myth is a double system and "myth is a value, truth is no guarantee for it, nothing prevents

it from being a perpetual alibi"(op. cit.: 122) . In its desire to both 'bury and praise' its 'honoured' texts, the canon does seem "a sort of constantly moving turnstile which presents alternately the meaning and its form"(Barthes, 1972: 121). It also always has "an 'elsewhere' at its disposal" (ibid). Moreover in its assumption of durable quality, a 'timelessness' proved paradoxically by the test of time, 'the canon' conforms further to Barthes' identification of myth as both 'stolen language' and 'depoliticised speech', a perfect foil for Barthes' barb that with myth "things appear to mean something by themselves"(op. cit.: 143).

At the same time, we were laying down a critical attitude and a method that runs through the work right up to the 2020 publication of *The Uses of Media Literacy*, a further 're-imagining': more mythologizing. No sleep till Hunslett.

Barthes After Barthes

"The ghost of Roland Barthes is suitably perplexed" (Penman, 1981).

Though Barthes was variously classified, Derrida's evaluation is perhaps the fairest: "Roland Barthes traversed periods systems, modes, 'phases' and 'genres'… his first move was to recognise in each of these their necessity or richness, their critical value and light, in order to turn them against dogmatism" (Derrida, 1981: 282). For Barthes in *Mythologies*, "the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn" to track "the progress of their solidification, their densification throughout historical discourse" (Barthes, 1975: 42). Barthes admits to "a mythology of the mythologist" but in doing so proclaims "What I claim

is to live to the full the contradiction of my time, which may well make sarcasm the condition of truth" (Barthes, 1972: 10).

One further interesting challenge which the project threw up and which my subsequent work has sometimes pursued was to do with the potential limitations of conventional academic modes of address. Whilst the invitation was open, the editorial process exerted some influence on the collection we wanted such as the availability of 28 'berths' in accordance with the scope of the first English version and all between 433 and 4040 words as Barthes' were. As a result, there are 'readings of culture' that were written but do not appear in the collection. They may be published elsewhere, or not at all. Other essays were 'refocused', cut down or extended, to comply with our editorial preferences, to be 'more Barthesian', to be less 'academic'. This was a point of collision for some contributors: one admitted to writing a referenced article and then deconstructing it:

"To this end, we asked authors to bracket their academic instincts (to reference, to paraphrase, to show how they have mined a 'field') and instead to 'do Barthes' on contemporary myth. We allowed minimal footnotes, because Barthes used these, but we reserve the luxury of academic references to ourselves in this article, imposing a scholarly authority with this apparently more scientific 'register'. What we present is, then, a 'figured world' partly of our own construction and thus we can no more claim to 'know' myth today than Barthes did or could. Our only recourse is to get inside it "(Bennett & McDougall, 2013:6)

The article also includes a useful summary of the outcomes with the proviso that "the discourses we identify are not 'organic":

“These 28 ‘expert’ essays can be arranged into four discursive categories – the temporal discourse, in which Barthes’ approach is maintained but ‘updated’; a discourse of secondary encoding, in which Barthes is more prominently ‘appropriated’ from within; a more political discourse of ‘unmasking’ towards a form of emancipation and a more frivolous ‘outlaw’ discourse“ (Bennett & McDougall, 2016a:59-60).

Laughey’s brutal but beautiful contribution ‘Ripper’ clearly belongs to the “more political discourse of unmasking” and is an angry response to the fact that there is a myth of the contemporary north “as dark, seedy, rundown, depressing and downright unfriendly, that persists in the contemporary collective imagination” (Laughey, 2013 : 94). Also that “it emerged from below and within, propagated by northerners more so than anyone else” (ibid). Laughey travels efficiently through this landscape by way of the Yorkshire Ripper and David Peace’s acclaimed Red Riding Quartet of novels, exploring the implications of muddled collective memory. This brings him to the most infamous Ripper who, of course, is Jack and for Laughey “no mere myth; he has become a Baudrillardian simulation” (op. cit.: 95). Thus while Sutcliffe’s crimes “are and were horrifically real, Jack is hyperreal” (ibid). This leads to a telling conclusion which visits the Whitechapel area of London, where Jack the Ripper is suspected to have worked, now a tourist attraction, and shuts down with these words:

“The great murderers of London town are celebrated, like everything else in that great city. Yorkshire, understandably, has no plans for a similar visitor attraction. Not even a century of myth-making and myth-remaking will change its mind” (ibid).

Laughey brings us decisively back to the issue: this is about meaning and the recovery of the historical dimension. Barthes' assignment for the mythologist is hardly an attractive one since, as he says, "the mythologist is excluded from this history in the name of which he professes to act" (Barthes, 1972: 158). Moreover "the havoc which he wreaks in the language of the community is absolute for him, it fills his assignment to the brim: he must live this assignment without any hope of going back or any assumption of payment" (Barthes, 1972: 158). The anxiety for Barthes, and the challenge for a reimagined project of education is that "The fact that we cannot manage to achieve more than an unstable grasp of reality doubtless gives the measure of our present alienation: we constantly drift between the object and its demystification, powerless to render its wholeness" (Barthes, 1972: 161) . Ironically, Barthes feels that "we are condemned for some time yet always to speak excessively about reality" whereas others later will argue it is the absence of a fix on the real that will come to characterize postmodernity. However, what this project did champion was Barthes' hope for "a reconciliation between reality and men, between description and explanation, between object and knowledge" (Barthes, 1972: 162). And this endeavour would also be taken up vigorously and imaginatively in our next project, *Doing Text* with its practical reconciliation of competing ideological elements.

4

WHERE PRACTICE IS PUT BEFORE THEORY, THE SUBJECT FREE CURRICULUM IS EXPLICATED AND SHOWING FOR ONCE BEATS TELLING,: DOING TEXT IN HARD TIMES.

"*Zeigen ist mehr als sein*" ('Showing trumps being': Brecht's advice to actors)

"If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!" "(Dickens, *Hard Times*)

While the Barthes project addressed theory with theorists, *Doing Text* addresses practice with practitioners:

This collection re-imagines the study of English and Media in a way that decentralises the text (e.g. romantic poetry or Film Noir) or media formats / platforms (e.g. broadcast media / new media). Instead, the authors work across boundaries in meaningful thematic contexts that reflect the ways in which people engage with reading, watching, making and listening in their textual lives. In so doing, this project recasts both subjects as combined in a more reflexive, critical space for the study of our everyday social and cultural interactions.

Across the chapters, the authors present applicable learning and teaching strategies that weave together art works, films, social practices, creativity, viral media, theatre, TV, social media, videogames and literature. The culmination of this range of strategies is a reclaimed blue skies approach to progressive textual education, free from constraining shackles of outdated ideas about textual categories and value that have hitherto alienated generations of students and both English and Media from themselves.

By 2016 I had not only lost the fight to maintain the A level in Cultural Studies I had also co-written and developed, but had also been co-opted into the fight to preserve, the tenth biggest A level subject, Media Studies. Appropriate then that in that year Media was almost deleted, I was writing a concluding chapter to a research project that was proposing, in a much more positive sense, opportunities to use media 'after the subject'. My contribution was titled, *After the Subject: Towards a Real Reform*, a title that shifted meanings during the process as partly explained in the introduction:

When this project was conceived in 2013, this chapter, always tentatively entitled *After the Subject: Towards a Real Reform*, was imagined very differently. Firstly, it was until quite recently going to be the opening salvo in a speculative assault on the curricular *status quo*, a manifesto of sorts, a set of principles to inspire a range of teacherly folk to imagine a life (and curriculum) beyond the confines of subjects. It was also, though, largely unwittingly focused on the secondary and tertiary curricula and the provenance/ redundancy of subjects *per* se at the very moment that 'academic subjects' were being given their most substantial post-mortal revalidation since the Second World War in a programme of reform bizarrely oblivious to the world pupils and students now inhabit" (Bennett, 2016: 149).

Barthes undoubtedly also extends a considerable influence over the next two research projects which both ended up in publication as versions of the edited collection but were both examples also of the 'writing as research' model we were employing. Both also practised a degree of continuity whereby practices were theorised and theories put into practice. Thus in *Doing Text* we engaged with practitioners about the potential opportunities offered by these open emancipatory approaches, our 'pedagogies of the inexpert' and in *Hard Times Today* called for academic practice in understanding the ways in which popular culture was responding to that which our critical practice called 'the Age of Austerity' (Bennett & MacDougall, 2017). In *Doing Text* we explicitly identify Barthes "as much more of a transitional figure and are keen not to saddle him with every limitation of every lightly taken position" (Bennett, 2016: 157) but we are also seeking a rather more directive set of starting points for what happens after sarcasm does prove to be a condition of the truth. Having flirted for years with the notion of education as a discursive project, an extended conversation, I was always both intrigued by Deleuze's claim that "We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it" and ultimately motivated by the rejoinder: "We lack creation. Resistance to the Present" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994: 108).

Thus I see in retrospect much of what I was doing both as a writer and teacher as part of what I call this 'unattributable' Deleuzian project. This becomes explicitly the case with *Doing Text*, our rebooting of the curriculum project which finds its model in Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, co-opted by Cormier as 'The Rhizomatic Model of Education':

"The rhizome metaphor, which represents a critical leap in coping with the loss of a canon against which to compare, judge, and value knowledge, may be particularly apt as a model for disciplines on the bleeding edge where the canon is fluid and knowledge is a moving target" (Cormier, 2008).

These 'assemblages' , these 'multiplicities' are consciously made, as Deleuze and Guattari insist they have to be, "but we don't know yet what the multiple entails when it is no longer attributed, that is, after it has been elevated to the status of a substantive" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:4). They are also consciously methodologies mindful of their respective functions: "To attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it;" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:22). As Deleuze and Guattari clarify "The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" and "pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectible, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 21). New territories often need not new maps but rather new cartographies.

Employing practitioners, in this case unpublished practitioners, as writer-researchers to reimagine a curriculum post-subject is a somewhat risky business but as Biesta has argued, "even if one engages in neatly organised forms of learning, there is always a risk" (Biesta, 2005: 77). And the *Doing Text* project was profoundly a form of learning for me in all the ways Biesta suggests that learning might happen:

"Not only is there a risk that you won't learn what you wanted to learn. There is also the risk that you will learn things that you couldn't have imagined that you would learn or that you couldn't have imagined that you would have wanted to learn. And there is the risk that you will learn something that you rather didn't want to learn, something about yourself, for example. To engage in learning always entails the risk that learning may have an impact on you, that learning may change you." (Biesta, 2005: 77)

The point of this work, of all of my writing over two decades, was always that it would be useful, reflecting Brecht's epitaph on a more modest scale: "He made suggestions; we carried them out". However the very different kinds of practice offered in response to our speculative invitations was a real learning experience for me, making me very seriously reconsider the importance of practice. This perhaps seems odd given I had been involved in teacher education for a decade by this time and as a writer was ostensibly an academic working in an Institute of Education. Perhaps I was experiencing something of that identity conflict which later became the premise of our most explicitly practice-driven collection, which pitched together identity and resistance. That book derived from a conversation about King Lear which in turn was prompted by a paper Ben Andrews and I published in *Metal Music Studies*, the only peer-reviewed *Heavy Metal Journal*, which referenced 'unaccommodated man' and was prefaced with a line of Barthes': "I am not where you think I am: I am where you think I am not" (Barthes, 1972: 122). The identity book took as a starting point, Lear's less gleeful gloss on liquid identity: "who is it can tell me who I am?", to which the Fool replies "Lear's shadow". This barb is perhaps closer to where I was with *Doing Text* and in particular with reference to Chris Waugh's uplifting account of teaching English (my subject) to inner London boys which engaged me first as lilacs to my dead land.

<u>Let Slip the Blogs of Waugh</u>

"A multiplicity has neither subject nor object" (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 9)

Waugh was assigned the starting point "Connecting Text" and from the first words injects a practical insistence which still takes me aback, like Dylan plugging in at the Manchester Free Trade Hall. Here is somebody making a change rather than merely talking about it:

“Agency Students in my secondary English classes no longer write in books. They exist and work in an open online community. We shifted our work online in pursuit of a set of key goals.” (Waugh, 2016: 119)

The writer CS Lewis is credited with the idea that ’we read to prove we’re not alone’. He got it from one of his students and there are plenty of occasions when as a writer you find your ideas confirmed in the work of others. The Waugh piece had a greater impact than this, because it took ideas we had been merely exploring and folded them into a coherent, exploratory practice. For moving online was not about embracing modern technology but about “our desire to increase their agency as learners” and the desire “to make their learning experience a more authentic reflection of how they engage with the world and we aimed to raise their autonomy in the process” (Waugh, 2016: 119). In short, Waugh’s project was “to shift the locus of control, and responsibility, in the classroom from the teacher, to the space between us and the students” (ibid). This was reinforced when he turned up at the book launch at Goldsmiths and captivated an audience of academics and PGCE students, privileging “the core artefact of our collaboration – the students’ work, our primary text” (Waugh, 2016: 119). As a determined collaborator with all of my students, this reinforced my long term project to counter the culture of assessment (which fetishizes the ‘test’ at the expense of the experience) with a culture of ‘production’ and engagement.

Waugh negotiates this via an online blog which firstly renders any work as “a fluid, interactive entity” open to the interventions of “Teachers, students, collaborators, family, peers,

audience and critics" in such a way that "the student-author builds a sense of their own agency in the world and the impact they may have on it" (Waugh, 2016: 119). Waugh also has something to embody that "resistance to the Present" that Deleuze invites in the form of a dismissal of the notion that school prepares for the 'real world'. Waugh addresses 'authenticity' simply as "the now" and manages to do/say what I have wanted to say/do decisively:

"To us, and our students, the classroom is very much the real world. In the classroom, our experience is rich, complex, unpredictable and frequently demands everything of us. We don't come to the classroom in order to be ready for some imperceptible future, we come to luxuriate in the now. This being the case, it becomes inevitable that the product of our time in the classroom, often a text, should also be invested with a status and integrity that befits the setting from which it arose. In this way, students create text that has purpose beyond the instruments and culture of the education system." (Waugh, 2016: 120)

There is also that element of 'rowing back' (boats against the current) that is evident in both Biesta and Rancière, of thinking the unthinkable and discovering it not unthinkable but rather unthought or not permitted to be thought. This is what is happening when Rancière confronts the idea that believing in the equality of intelligences might be thought unfeasible.

We must therefore reverse the critics' questions. How, they ask, is a thing like the equality of intelligence thinkable? And how could this opinion be established without disrupting the social order? We must ask the opposite question: how is intelligence possible without equality?

For Waugh it is the moment that he says without alarm that, “In our department the notion of writing text in order to achieve a grade is an anathema” (ibid). In the era of G scores and league tables, this feels like the ‘Till human voices wake us and we drown’ moment:

“Our students create texts to communicate ideas, feelings, fragments of their real and imagined lives. They write to record experiences and sometimes to help themselves to think through a complicated idea. We work to help them to create texts that achieve these objectives, and as part of this, we will employ the tools we have created to measure and acknowledge thresholds through which the students may pass in their development as writers” (Waugh, 2016: 121).

The juxtaposition of Rancière and Waugh is deliberate. Both are activists, meeting Leask’s promise that:

“Teachers and students alike can now be regarded as creative agents, capable of voluntary and intentional counter-practices, and always able, in principle, to resist aspects of the kinds of managerialism, instrumentalization and commodification they face daily, and to construct strategic interventions.” (Leask, 2012: 68).

Moments of Gentle Apocalypse

“We teach to change the world” (Brookfield, 1995:1)

This is a call to arms and one that I have tried to answer via a more determined focus on teaching and teachers. As Leask (2012:69) notes quoting Foucault (2000): “‘We are always free’; we can always resist; our ongoing task is to construct ‘arts of living’ that might counter the manifold expressions of ‘fascism’ that lurk throughout institutions, systems, relations,

and even ourselves." Waugh is an architect of 'arts of living' within one of the most restricted contexts of all, a contemporary English school classroom. He offers the "fluidity of the students' connected texts" in the face of reforms that outlawed interdisciplinarity and bizarrely reinforced the discreteness of subject just under a hundred years after Alfred North Whitehead (1967: 7) put this model to bed:

"There is only one subject-matter for education, and that is Life in all its manifestations. Instead of this single unity, we offer children--Algebra, from which nothing follows; Geometry, from which nothing follows; Science, from which nothing follows; History, from which nothing follows; a Couple of Languages, never mastered; and lastly, most dreary of all, Literature, represented by plays of Shakespeare, with philological notes and short analyses of plot and character to be in substance committed to memory. Can such a list be said to represent Life, as it is known in the midst of living it?"(Whitehead, 1929: 22)

It is in the midst of living life that Waugh offers a "complete redevelopment of our means of assessment" and where "Like everything else in the learning experience the assessment processes orbit around the primary text, validating aspects and skills demonstrated, but never over-shadowing it or exerting so much of a gravitational force as to distort its central purpose, as defined by the author" (Waugh, 2016: 121). Waugh's is a reimagining of the educative experience in a present most haunted by the spectre of the past but where the horror of the performative is redeemed. For as Waugh shows, what Butler originally says about the performative character of gender is equality true of '*teachering*'. For Butler, gender is a series of acts whose constant repetition creates the illusion that an underlying nature exists: so too the illusion of a proper education. This means however that however

oppressive those repetitions are, they can easily and quickly be changed: the object can be subjected to a subversive destabilization: *solve et coagula*! Brecht talked in his later years about the art of forgetting (*die Kunst des Vergessens*) as a pre-requisite for making new work. This forgetting of those things that we have come to accept as given strikes me even now with the clarity of Barthes' remarkable epitome of the teaching act at his inaugural lecture:

"Speaking and listening interwoven here should resemble the comings and goings of a child playing beside his mother, leaving her, returning to bring her a pebble, a piece of string, and thereby tracing around a calm centre a whole locus of play within which the pebble, the string come to matter less than the enthusiastic giving of them" (in Sontag, 1993: 476-477)

Something is starting to make sense here as Waugh's text leads me to a better understanding of my own; both this commentary and the wider excursions over the longer time. It is that "the student's connected text has its own integrity, its own purpose and it is as much judged by its audience and author as it might be by the teacher" and that "Connecting a classroom text allows for it to reach an audience, be archived for future reference, be modified, replicated, contested" (Waugh, 2016: 122). It is this connectedness which, for better or worse, has been the central theme of this commentary and, in a personal sense, its revelation, even a belief that " A connected text can fulfil its human purpose, whatever that may be" (ibid). Lisa Jeffrey, who worked with Marshall McLuhan records that "He repeated insistently that we should stop saying, 'Is this a good thing or a bad thing?' and start saying, "what's going on?" (Benedetti & DeHart, 1996) It is a simplicity evident in the Barthes earlier

and in Waugh's simple deconstruction of the academic default: "Few people write to prove they can write. They write to think, to record and to communicate (Waugh, 2016: 123)."

And recognising this makes it straightforward to understand the increasing influence of Rancière who argues that "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak" (Rancière 2006: 8). Rancière's (1991, 2009, 2012) 'ignorant schoolmaster' parable requires that the teacher 'must always be one step ahead', in other words re-distancing knowledge because the student:

"...is the one who does not know what she does not know or how to know it... he is the one who knows how to make it an object of knowledge at what point... knowledge that cannot simply be ordered in accordance with the ascent from the simplest to the most complex" (Rancière, 2009: 8-9).

Key to this is the transparent acceptance of the profoundly unequal pedagogic relation, pedagogic practices and values from which must emerge a more radical pedagogy which can no longer maintain that 'stupefying distance' that can 'only be bridged by an expert':

"The ignorant schoolmaster is named thus... because he has uncoupled his mastery from his knowledge... he does not teach his knowledge, but orders them to venture into the forest of things and signs." (Rancière, 1991: 11).

Towards a Real Reform

"We must all work to make this world worthy of its children" (Tim Brighouse, 2002).

One interesting way to think about this was prompted by an invitation I received to participate in a colloquium at Edinburgh University which called for a response to the work of the Czech-born philosopher Vilem Flusser and specifically his notion of artistic interventions as 'extended gestures'. My own contribution was ostensibly a response to our Barthes work coupled with some

literary critical work on the poet Nick Burbridge with whom I work as an editor, but I now better see how this also contributed to the momentum gathering in what now more clearly to me seems like a body of work. Seeing the work for a moment as an extended gesture is persuasive. The promise of 'gesture' is contradictory, at once indexical and yet, for Flusser "a movement… for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation" (Flusser, 2014: 7): instinctive and contrived. In this 'extending gesture' co-exist Derrida's endless deferment, Brecht's social *Gestus a*nd the promise of primal human contact, what Baudelaire describes as "the emphatic truth of gesture in the great circumstances of life" (in Barthes, 1972: 13). This is the energy that my chapter seeks to embody calling for participation in what Rancière has called a '"factory of the sensible… the formation of a shared sensible world, a common habitat, by the weaving together of a plurality of human activities' (Rancière, 2006 :39).

This commentary at times does feel like it is scratching this way and that without hitting exactly upon the spot bogged down in the formally academic and 'theoretical' and perhaps the fanciful. It is not always as it would wish to be "like a Robinson Crusoe discovering an island…'possessed' by his own fooling and jesting…" (De Certeau, 1988: 173). A premise of the colloquium was a desire to attend "to the form of our gathering, the poesis of our

interaction, in order to create a space for dialogue and discussion": so too this. When he was elected to the Chair of Semiology at the College de France in 1977, Barthes made it his priority to 'renew' "the manner of presentation of the course or seminar, in short to problematise the discursive forms. I asked then and have not stopped asking: What are we making and why does it matter? Abstract? Paper? Talk? Teach? Session? Lesson? Telling? Text? Something woven! This is the issue in Derrida's beguiling 'defence speech'/critical essay, *The Law of Genre* (1980), an oft quoted but little explored 'essay'. The 'generic' is exactly that which stalks 'anticipation' and requires every act to meet our need to identify it. Derrida calls genre a "principle of contamination… a law of impurity", insisting that "Madness is law, the law is madness". It is here in this 'paper thing' (in both senses) and in our attempts to define a context for discussion. Derrida points out that genre has always "been able to play the role of order's principle" but goes on to explore the 'generic' in a much more useful and provocative way. Derrida frees the creative act from appropriation, offering participation without belonging, with genre working "within and without the work, along its boundary" (Derrida, 1980: 65). So too, these extending 'gestures'. (Bennett, 2012)

Yet this commentary is a 'text' which attempts to elude/ sidestep/ postpone/ avoid 'rules' and classification and is therefore "stubbornly unrealistic". As I accept that any public 'gesture' (like teaching or presenting) presupposes power, I again want my methods to address this power. I am partly experimenting here with Barthes' advice: "In writing this means fragmentation, in teaching digression/excursion"(in Sontag, 1993: 476) . My take on 'extending gesture' does reach beyond the Flusser definition of embodied gesture but I hope it will also work back to this.

I understand that what is happening here may be seen as a series of potential starting points which constitute in a consciously contrived way my life and work, my interests, my research, my tastes, my experiences, though nuanced with the notion of an intellectual/critical/ aesthetic life. Let's call them 'gestures', though here the medium is the metaphor not the method: they are in some important (or at least relevant) sense un- or dis-embodied. In what respect can these 'gestures' be embodied? Is the embodied gesture always a social act? Is this the epitome of the 'meaningful' act, this marking in and of time: Eliot's insistence that "Every poem is an epitaph" (*Little Gidding)*. Barthes was there early, writing in *Writing Degree Zero,* his 'series opener' that "The Novel is a Death: it transforms life into destiny, a memory into a useful act, duration into oriented and useful time" (Barthes, 1977: 63). Even more pertinently he continues, "But this transformation can only be accomplished in the full view of society" (ibid), what Plath's Lady Lazarus calls "The theatrical/ Comeback in broad day/ To the same place, the same face…" (Sylvia Plath, *Lady Lazarus*).

Thus we contrive in our 'fictions', critical as well as creative, our sincere attempts to engage, to bear 'a little more reality'. Indeed, Barthes reminds us that "All method is a fiction" ((Mallarmé in Sontag, 1993: 476). This 'method' knows it is a fiction, this 'language about languages' is fully aware that "every relation of exteriority of one language to another is, in the long run, untenable"(ibid) . In such circumstances we must embrace Barthes' "moment of gentle apocalypse":

"There is an age at which we teach what we know. Then comes another age at which we teach what we do not know; this is called research. Now perhaps comes the age of another experience; that of unlearning, of yielding to the unforeseeable change which forgetting

imposes on the sedimentation of the knowledges, cultures and beliefs we have traversed." (in Sontag, 1993: 478)

Resistance is sometimes about forgetting, about letting go of old tensions to seek new forms of placidity and energy.

"Writing", Barthes wrote, " makes knowledge festive"(op. cit: 464), in line with the living not the dead. Flusser's point about hands not working creatively "if they impress stereotypes" is entirely in line with Barthes' desire that semiology should primarily allow the study of "how a society produces stereotypes". And here lies the danger, the risk, since "The stereotype is the word repeated without any magic, any enthusiasm, as though it were natural", the "canonical, constraining form of the signifier " and at worst "the present path of truth"(Barthes, 1990:) . And here is 'myth' in the Barthesian sense, defined by 'the way it utters'.

The writerly text, for Barthes, is one that repositions readers in a way that both challenges and productively disorientates them. Jouissance is the disturbingly transformative pleasure we get, in significantly different ways, from that experience, which is partly always about confronting the unresolved as unresolvable. I think of Plath's last poem Edge, which culminates (so too a life of poems) in the following:

The moon has nothing to be sad about,

Staring from her hood of bone.

She is used to this sort of thing.

Her blacks crackle and drag.

Here is the creative gesture in all of its glory and ambiguity, infinitely and exquisitely extended. And the ultimate horror and pleasure and terror is that it's always 'about' writing: the ghost and the quick shape, in joy or grief.

Interestingly, Barthes wrote early that "Writing is no way an instrument for communication, it is not an open route", rather "writing is a hardened language which is self-contained" (Barthes, 1977:in Sontag, 1993: 39). Writing about Barthes, Lombardo argues that "Writing is an act of will, which must be all the stronger if one is disenchanted" and that "The will to write is a form of work" (Lombardo, 2010: 24). All of which is massively relevant both to this commentary and the 'published work' at the point that the former becomes the latter. This "condition of complete simplicity (costing not less than everything)" (*Little Gidding)* is which that we are trying to 'embody', songs, as it were, in the key of life. Barthes writes of the "Notion of a text in which is braided, woven, in the most personal way, the relation of every kind of bliss; those of life and those of the text, in which reading and the risks of real life are subject to the same anamnesis" (in Sontag, 1993: 412).

Sontag suggests that Barthes' work is, as this commentary is, provisional. She also reflects on Barthes' method which above all defies classification, "the sclerosis of systems":

"He always wrote flat out, was always concentrated, keen, indefatigable. This dazzling inventiveness seems not just a function of Barthes' extraordinary powers as a mind, as a writer. It seems to have almost the status of a position - as if this is what critical discourse must be."(Sontag, 1993: viii)

After all, Barthesian notions of text' and 'textuality' are predicated on the reader as a creative participant, as an inventor of meaning. Criticism alters and relocates meaning: to write is a dramatic art: "Let the essay avow itself almost a novel". It is a method which stresses the immediacy, exchanging the anxiety of anticipation for the thrill of engagement, of immersion in the 'game':

"The semiologist is, in short, an artist… He plays with signs… whose fascination he savours and wants to make others savour and understand. The sign, at least the sign he sees, is always immediate, subject to the kind of evidence that leaps to the eyes, like a trigger of the imagination…" (in Sontag, 1993: 475)

And it is this generosity that persists: this simple open gesture, this 'giving' through which Eliot's Thunder defines us:

The awful daring of a moment's surrender

Which an age of prudence can never retract

By this, and this only, we have existed (*The Wasteland*)

And as with writing so also teaching. Though my chapter, essentially the book's conclusion, calls explicitly for 'real' reform, it is drawing on the energies and examples of the practitioner-researchers co-opted to the project whose spirit and example makes the case more clearly. As such it's a great advertisement for teachers and teaching as potentially transformative, subject that was to be the focus of the next development.

5

IN WHICH FURTHER EDUCATION IS CONSIDERED IN AN AGE OF ANXIETY AND AUTONOMY IS SOUGHT RATHER THAN GUARANTEED AND STUDENTS BECOME LEARNERS AND STOP LEARNING

"Culture is the rational creation of human nature" (Edward Bond, *Introduction to The Fool*)

LEAR: Who is it that can tell me who I am?"(Shakespeare, *King Lear)*

This episode and the next one address our book, *Identity and Resistance in Further Education*: here through an exploration of the project itself via a consideration of the opening and closing chapters and in the next episode via my own work on 'accommodation'. Both episodes relate to a collection promoted by these words:

In recent years, Further Education has reached a crossroads, with questions being asked about its function, aims and focus, as well as querying the role of the FE teacher, the key aspects of the curriculum and which values should inform FE pedagogy. *Identity and Resistance in Further Education* explores these questions and effectively conveys the sense of uncertainty that those in the field are experiencing today.

Connecting Higher Education and FE practitioners and researchers, the book gathers a collection of essays covering a range of topics, including: the journey from student to teacher, critical reflective practice as a way of organising identity, values-based teacher education and policy critique. In keeping with the themes of resistance and creativity, the chapters draw on a wide range of theoretical, as well as literary, perspectives to offer answers. Problematising relationships between the teacher and the institution and the teacher and government, the book argues that the profound challenge to teachers' values and identities finds its response in a critical collegiality.

This book will be of great interest to academics, researchers and postgraduate students engaged in the study of further education, educational policy and teacher education. It should also be essential reading for practitioners and policymakers.

The Preparation of the Collection

"Most things are never meant." (Larkin, Going, Going)

This episode reflects on a book collection that represents a transition for both my published work and indeed my interests and it has strangely proved to be the most difficult episode to write. This feels much to do with the discrepancy I feel between its theoretically pivotal position in the grand narrative and the way I remember it and feel about it. My first attempt to fully articulate this ended up on the cutting room floor described by me as a 'car crash', if only because it ploughed recklessly on at speed without ever providing a straightforward account of the genesis of the project. It also failed to address my complicated feelings about it. On reflection, it may be that *Identity and Resistance* is my least favourite 'album' but perhaps the gesture it makes is the most important thing I've been involved in. Certainly the collection-come-project began as less than both: indeed it emerged explicitly from the desire within the post-compulsory education (PCE) team at Walsall campus to create an impetus which might encourage a group of teacher educators who were all experienced FE teachers to promote writing about this neglected corner of education. In some sense therefore it was both the least and most convincing example of a 'project' in this collection. Its gestation was measured in years rather than months. Its early manifestation when it was just known as 'Pete's book' was notionally as a container or cover for the writings of colleagues members of the wider partnership and progressively students, by which I mean student teachers and students who were teachers.

Rob Smith got properly involved when we started to get some writing but what became this project spanned his promotion and migration to another provider and his work with Vicky Duckworth on their inspiring 'Re-imagining FE: transforming lives' project. Vicky

Duckworth's work was anyway a formative influence on what we wanted to do in nearly every way and then what we did. Duckworth was an energiser across this period along with Petrie, Daly and Orr (2015-2020) but also in her book *Learning Trajectories, Violence and Empowerment amongst Adult Basic Skills Learners* she provided a particular kind of example by predicating her exploration of adult literacy on the experiences of 16 adult learners.

This was a key statement because it put ideas about situated literacy to work decisively in context, predicated on an approach which listened to those who had hitherto been only, even if sympathetically 'categorised'. This includes the use of poems, stories and photographs, which Duckworth, using Richardson, explains are there to show "*another person* how it bis to feel something" (Richardson, 2003: 190 in Duckworth, 2013:2): this is about showing not telling. Looking now from a distance it is easier to see how *Identity and Resistance* emerges, if haphazardly within an informal network of these kinds of interventions and interventionists. The Duckworth book is important in this respect because of its patient authority, based on research over six years and its devastating simplicity: "This book seeks to highlight how 16 former Basic Skills learners have been shaped by the public domain and the private domain"(Duckworth, 2013: 1). Here, at the *ultima thule* of educational provision, the furthest point that can be reached of the already under-researched and under-explored, even recently named 'Lifelong Learning' sector, Duckworth makes her stand and urges us to join her, merely by reminding us how much there is to do.

By predicating her study on Basic Skills students, a group whose status and apparent capacity to involve themselves in anything as sophisticated as research was clearly displayed on their label, she implicitly makes the case for a transformative pedagogy that starts with a

revolution in our heads. This is an important moment and I'm reminded of an almost equivalent moment in Media and Cultural Studies and the work of Angela McRobbie. In her much-cited paper on readings of *Jackie* (the magazine aimed at teenage girls and named after its editor the writer Jacqueline Wilson), McRobbie, while conducting a rigorously Feminist critique of its constructions of adolescent feminity, more importantly acknowledges that "until we have a clearer idea of just how girls read *Jackie* and encounter its ideological force our analysis remains one-sided (McRobbie, 1982: 283). What was also in Duckworth's book, which would pass through our project as an energy and cohere in the transforming lives project, was her belief that "education can be truly life enhancing and transforming if appropriate mechanisms are put in place to push open spaces that create a meaningful enquiry into people's lives" (Duckworth, 2013: 2). As Illich (1970: 28) said, "Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting".

Reading Sue Middleton's introduction to Lefebvre on education, I begin to understand how the work behind me (nominally in Media and Cultural studies) connects with *Identity and Resistance* and the forthcoming assaults on what Lefebvre calls "a certain nefarious pedagogic illusion" (Lefebvre, 2002: 68). Lefebvre's suggested method, like Duckworth's and hopefully ours, is "to highlight the part played by education and its importance in everyday life" (ibid). This is also the approach adopted by Rancière, who like Lefebvre was active in the student uprisings in Paris in 1968:

"One of the rare things I did in 1968 was taking part in the discussions at the factory gates or a few meetings inside the factories. That movement ran completely counter to Marxism

both as we'd learned it and as we taught it. That's why I especially got involved in what seemed to me important, that is, meeting workers" (Rancière, 2016: 16).

This led Rancière to the confirmed position, adopted in practice by Duckworth and consciously in my own work, that "There is no hierarchy between different types of discourse" (op. cit: 22). He embodies an unwillingness to accept ontologies of identity and a willingness to embrace "events that happen at the dividing line; they are phenomena that have to do with barriers that you see and that you transgress, crossing over from one side to the other" (op. cit.: 24-25). Such 'transgressions, like Duckworth's study and the 'Dancing Princesses' trilogy (Petrie et al, 2015-20), are for Rancière attempts to demolish the causal hierarchy, "to bring out a sensible world that's unstable" (op. cit.: 29). In his case the approach is textual: "I took worker's texts as being the same as any other texts to be studied in their texture and their performance and not as expressions of something else" (ibid).

Reframing *Identity and Resistance* in this context is an interesting experience: a genuine rediscovery of the energy expended by a range of contributors over a long period of time. This was definitely a problem for me at the time, the feeling of something tentatively and sometimes expediently being put together rather than having its own momentum: pieces, not even chapters written both for and before a collection at times more imaginary than imagined. Then, after Rob Smith came more decisively on board, the project was bolstered by 'voices off' and vital ones: Joel Petrie, Kay Sidebottom, Lou Mycroft: connections with the always more focused and measured *Dancing Princesses* 'series'.

I now recognise, as others more unapologetically did, the rough energy and 'defiance' of this collection which was written across a chaotic period in FE typified by increased

managerialism and significantly decreased funding. As the blurb suggests, “the creativity of teachers’ responses and their often dogged insistence on sticking to their values while adapting to changing circumstances has taken on simultaneously noble and tragic dimensions” (Bennett & Smith, 2018: i). However, my appreciation of this intellectual drama will forever be tempered by a genuine tragedy that I guess ‘haunts’ my understanding of this project. David Wise, the “teacher, colleague and friend”, to whom this book is dedicated had time within this protracted process to contract a virulent form of cancer, which he fought bravely for two years before it claimed him in April 2017. He was about my age with a young family and the illness seemed to come without warning out of a clear blue sky: he found a lump on his neck just as we were leaving for the summer holidays: teachers eager for a chance to recharge batteries. David had been slightly sceptical about the project: he suspected my fondness for continental theory would render the book too abstract. Even my working title, taken from *King Lear*, caused him to cast the tolerant ironic eye. He suggested, even insisted, that our proper task would be to make a book that FE teachers would want to read since it was about them, for them and partially by them. I think we only achieved that in part, which is a regret of mine. We were better at showing that a range of contributors could be involved and that does have a lasting legacy in the work of our team and partnership.

The Meanings and Practices of Everyday Life

“If we entirely embrace the struggle, miracles can happen” (Mao)

Despite my reservations, I find coming back to it a much greater sense of the authenticity and immediacy of the volume, delivered ‘from the patch’ with intent. This is worked

grounded in practice and pragmatism with a feeling for the everyday which links straight back to Lefebvre's great project:

"To study the everyday is to wish to change it. To change the everyday is to bring its confusions into the light of day and into language; it is to make its latent conflicts apparent, and thus to burst them asunder. It is therefore both theory and practice, critique and action. (Lefebvre, 2002: 209)

It's also a collection that burns with a desire to engage with the struggle to emancipate teachers and students alike. It addresses implicitly Lefebvre's exploration of how alienated human nature is 'pedagogically produced' Then when 'policy and pain' give way to 'creativity and resistance', there is speculation on how we can "'pedagogically produce' ourselves otherwise – a 'de-alienated' or liberated subjectivity?" (Middleton, 2017: 413). Lefebvre is also a useful commentator on the business of teacher autonomy in neoliberal times. He distinguishes between 'dressage, education and learning' (2004:

38–45) with dressage as "training' or 'drill', based on routine, repetition and

Obedience" (Lefebvre, 2004: 39), increasingly the staple diet in an assessment-orientated FE (see also Foucault, 1977). Our contributors also pitch education as other than this, opening out possibilities, engaging students in 'real' problems of 'lived' experience: "Education ought to centre on concrete problems that are both practical and theoretical, both empirical and conceptual" (Lefebvre, 1969: 157). Like our contributors, Lefebvre is looking for 'contradictions' which "give rise to problems, and thus to a set of possibilities' (2002: 209). Middleton argues that when "Teachers and students engage in collective critique of everyday life" then "Critique is a pedagogy" which is an interesting comment on the texture of the collection.

In an interview in 2002, Rancière is challenged to explain why he started teaching, given that one of his constant concerns "has been to analyse and condemn any posture of mastery, particularly theoretical, pedagogical 'academic' mastery" (Rancière, 2017: 115). This is a pertinent question also for my own work, which consciously champions Rancière's approach and is therefore subject to the same implied criticism. Though my career has been very different to the philosopher's, his reply includes much that rings true in my case:

"I became involved almost unwittingly… I am in the first instance, a student. I am one of those people who is a perpetual student and whose professional fate, as a consequence is to teach others. 'Teaching' obviously implies a certain position of mastery, 'researcher' implies in some way a position of knowledge, 'teacher-researcher' implies the teacher adapting a position of institutional mastery to one of mastery based on knowledge." (Rancière, 2017: 115)

In explaining his teaching history, Rancière also explains that "as a teacher I always resisted divisions into levels (advanced, intermediate etc.)" and that "In my courses I often have people of all different levels, in the belief that each student does what he or she can do"(Rancière, 2017: 116). Rancière is looking back at a radical practice that was not without consequence: his department at Paris VIII lost degree accreditation for more than a decade , not least for refusing to set exams (Rancière, 2016: 18). This is no dilettantism: there are always very real risks when something is really at stake.

The myth of austerity strikes at the home of the second chance

"HOWARD: Cause you've gotta admit, business is business" (Miller, *Death of a Salesman*)

In his Preface to *Identity and Resistance*, Sir Alan Tuckett signposts all of the salient issues. Firstly the context: "Constant changes in regulation have been accompanied by an increasingly intrusive inspection regime, all backed by policies derived from a political nostalgia for the Britain of the fifties, and a narrow privileging of academic curricula for young people" (Tuckett, 2018: xii) . Then he underlines the considerable challenge of balancing "the needs of learners with the performance required by the State through its funding and inspection mechanisms" while being "strongly resistant to the tide of the times" (ibid). Finally he beautifully embodies our message: "This sorry state calls for a powerful re-assertion of the case for creativity and imaginative enquiry in post-compulsory education, and for the recognition of the key role of professional teachers, and those that train them, in securing the spaces for that creativity to flourish" (Tuckett, 2018: xiv).

My influence on the Introduction is very clear in the Barthesian reading of the myth of austerity. I also explored this at the same time elsewhere in a collection on popular culture (Bennett & MacDougall, 2016) where I was also employing Mark Fisher's classic reading of neoliberalism with its "pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (Fisher, 2009 : 16).

This is a book though about teaching and particularly about 'teaching as learning' and teaching as a form of affirmative action. There is critique certainly and "stark and uncomfortable insights but countering

these, maintain a commitment to creativity, to practical solutions, to

producing resources of hope" (Bennett & Smith, 2018: 3). Neoliberalism is a mythology *par excellence*, the latest appearance of a 'natural order', presented as necessary and inevitable (Fisher 2009 : 17), proposing a mythic 'Age of Austerity' which is in truth a consciously precipitated 'age of anxiety'. The point however is to change it.

Though these pressures may have caused teachers in further education to question their selfhood, their values and principles, and it may be true that "a certain precariousness has become the order of the day: "a sense of insecurity has invaded all of our minds" (Lipovetsky 2005 : 13). However, the greater crisis is that "Writing and thinking about further education is in short supply" (Bennett & Smith, 2018:). This collection constitutes and creates "the groundwork to make thinking through a future possible", a collaborative praxis "as informed, committed action which embodies certain ethical qualities oriented to improving the relations of those involved" (Taylor, 2016 : 2). This is a significant challenge, given that even FE's proud USP of being the 'home of the second chance' has been twisted:

"…has suddenly become a second chance chiefly for the governmental imperative to see all so-called 'learners' included/processed/ managed. And 'included' here is more likely to be 'accounted for' than 'educated'." (Bennett & Smith, 2018: 5)

This is what Kendall calls playing out "the truth games of the structuralist subject (students, teachers, 'disciplines)' which she contrasts with re-knowing and remaking "pedagogies of meaning making and taking in ways that reposition the subject within the alternative kind of post-structuralist paradigm we have sought" (Kendall, 2011: 224).

Emancipatory practices: the pedagogy of the inexpert

"Nothing you can do but you can learn how to be you in time" (The Beatles, *All You Need Is Love*)

Kendall seeks, as I do, to locate potential change in "teachers' own identity work, reading ourselves against the grain"(Kendall, 2011: 224), to move beyond the structures and ideologies which make the classroom a place of fictitious accounts of meaning-making . It can be argued that the pedagogy advocated here and across my more recent work takes this partly as its starting point, in instituting the classroom as a place of transversality, of crossover points and agreeing that the jurisdictions surrounding so-called learners (students and teachers) are reconsidered. Kendall's route to a 'pedagogy of the inexpert' is via a critique of authorship which she reminds us Foucault defines as "a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault, 1991: 119 cited in Bennett, Kendall and McDougall, 2011: 225)

Here is the parallel with authorial authority and the pre-eminence of pre-existent meanings: "the schoolmaster's explanatory logic presents inequality axiomatically" (Rancière, 2010: 5). This is a paradox which Rancière's ignorant schoolmaster addresses on the basis that equality and inequality are not states but opinions, indeed 'axioms' that might be verified or denied. Verifying equality as an axiom thus requires a method which is predicated on a particular kind of ignorance, which is an ignorance of inequality so that the teacher "addresses him or herself to the ignorant person not from the point of view of the person's ignorance but of the

person's knowledge; the one who is supposedly ignorant in fact already understands innumerable things" (Rancière, 2010: 5)

This is in many ways is the foundation of the 'pedagogy of the inexpert', predicated on an understanding of "the kinds of contingent, playfulness that characterise the lifeworld experiences of young people" in these hypermodern times as the 'reading subject' becomes a dialogic conceit at once both agentive and relationally situated (Bennett, Kendall and McDougall, 2011: 225).

Although much of this contemporary pedagogical practice appears to offer a student-centred approach, focused on individual capability and need and working to counter disadvantage, the improvement offered comes from an improvement plan validated 'elsewhere'. What is not addressed is the agency of the student, even within their own educational sphere of operation: "The student is offered a stake in what is known but not in how it is known, who it is known by, whether it is worth knowing, or that there might be alternative ways of knowing" (Bennett, Kendall and McDougall, 2011: 229). This returns us to notions of the classroom as a place of 'transversality' of crossover points where "the jurisdictions surrounding so-called learners (students and teachers) are reconsidered" (Rancière, 2016: 32) It is here where a circle of power might intersect a circle of powerlessness because, as Ranciere makes clear:

"the relation of forces is very particular. The circle of powerlessness is always already there: it is the very workings of the social world, hidden in the evident difference between ignorance and science" Rancière, 1991:15).

Any alternative pedagogy will want to address the workings of the social world by verifying an equality which is otherwise put off into the future.

Nothing can be taken for granted: Rancière as an activist demands action, explaining that " The circle of power, on the other hand, can only take effect by being made public." Also interestingly he adds that also "it can only appear as a tautology or an absurdity" (ibid).

I find it pertinent that "The circle of power… can only take effect by being made public" and "can only appear as a tautology or an absurdity", an experience I have certainly had and which is a feature of some of my work, indeed perhaps a reason for it. Perhaps this is inevitable if "discourses organized with the goal of being right" are to be disabled and a method of equality has been instituted in which we "find the right sentences to make themselves understood by others" (Rancière, 1991: 44).

Kendall locates the inexpert teacher at a distance from a mastery model of specialist content knowledge, embracing a co-constructivist ethnographic model of 'finding out'. Kendall is aware that "a pedagogy founded on this set of ideas might look very different… because a pedagogy based on this kind of understanding would of necessity be process rather than content oriented" (Bennett, Kendall and McDougall, 2011: 232). I find the spirit of my subsequent work in this area in Kendall's insistence that such an approach "requires rather a reading of teacher identity 'against the grain' to accept our awareness of but unfamiliarity with and most importantly *inexpertise* in the particular textual fields of learners and the ways they make texts matter"(ibid). Here is that model of teaching as searching which has been a constant thread in this commentary, although Kendall references "learners' auto-ethnographic story-telling" and the need to "accept and embrace the more uncharted, as yet unknowable learning spaces that emerge" (op. cit.: 233) .

Resistance is fertile

"The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child." (Jung, 1953; 136)

Never mind the high risk tests, the pedagogy we are proposing is a reproach to programmed leaning and therefore a genuine commitment on the part of teachers resisting a neoliberal 'project' that "is chafing against what it is to be human" (Bennett and Smith, 2018: 194). It is still widely believed that those who speak out in cultures like these are often victimised and lose their jobs.

The use of Virilio in the chapter reinforces the dislocation between the system and the educational lifeworld, seeing this as a spectacle of Roman proportions complete with essential tests/ trials "because as 'turnstiles' they control the circulation of human resources" (Bennett & Smith, 2018:):

"Whoever controls the territory possesses it. Possession of territory is not

primarily about laws and contracts, but first and foremost a matter of movement and circulation" (Virilio in Armitage, 2000).

The job of recovery, reinforced hopefully from our experience of the pandemic, is to reclaim the landscape and its features from the experience of merely travelling through and around it He warns of "this government of differential motility, of harnessing and mobilizing, incarcerating and accelerating things and people" (Virilio, 2006 : 8). The stakes are high since the cost is paid in the principles of a humanistic, liberal education. Some like Tuck have declared the system "an unworkable framework for school reform and teacher education" (Tuck 2014 : 324) and neoliberalism "as nihilistic, as death-seeking" (ibid.) All in all these are

challenging times and FE teachers didn't ask to be in the centre of it but they are, between 'first go' and 'last chance' and here they make a kind of stand. Though "no 'goalpost' is static" and "the performative institution is only capable of reflecting back a performative shadow of themselves" these practitioners find ways to say who they are and where they stand (Biesta, 2006) which are predicated not on ontologies of identity but rather on the strength of the collective. As Rob Smith writes, using Badiou's notion of 'fraternity' as a guideline, these teacher find "an affirmation of themselves through their relations with others: their students but also other staff – possibly at departmental level, or with individual allies in the workplace; or even, as in the case of this book, with others of like mind outside the institution" (Bennett & Smith, 2018:). Once again we are back to the everyday, bearing witness to 'the way we live now' in the hope that things might change with a wish that in doing this, things might change.

Reason's not the need: nothing will come of nothing

"If man is incapable of changing reality, he adjusts himself instead" (Freire, 1973: 4)

Given that I am also both pragmatic and a practitioner, it is inevitable that these positions involve me in collisions of various kinds with pretty much every aspect of formal education as practised anywhere, save in "cul-de-sacs where unrealized possibilities were stranded" (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000: 60) Memory of WB Yeats)). The truth is that, as Deleuze points out, the creation of the rhizome implies the creation of a map that is "open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an

individual, group, or social formation" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 21). An important distinction is made by Deleuze between a map and a tracing, which follows a pre-determined path that is familiar to conventional educational models predicated on learning outcomes and prescribed content. Furthermore, Deleuze perceptively observes that "The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence'" (ibid)

My argument is that my work with students, like my writing creates "an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General" entirely because this writing "has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come" (op. cit. 22). This is perhaps why my own university rejected my application to the Higher Education Academy twice (via written submission and 'professional conversation) because I cannot sanction 'learning outcomes', module guides', the 'improvement agenda' etc. I do not really approve of formal assessment: I collaborate with my students in valuable 'work' which I do mark, but the top-up degree I run has neither assessment objectives or learning outcomes which are known to students nor any mark scheme that might be useful to them. (No student has asked me for a mark scheme in seven or eight years.) Interestingly, the students seem to do very well and the external examiners are always very happy with the work commenting only on my refusal to ever say how work might be better!

Like Rancière I am concerned with an immanent present where intensity is always a feature of intellectual endeavour:

"I've never been able to work the way you do in history or the social sciences where you amass data and then process it. I just can't do that. The way I work is not by gathering data that I then process afterwards, but by managing to attain a certain level of intensity. Something leaps out as Deleuze would say 'forcing you to think'." (Rancière, 2016: 36).

When I came to survey the territories of FE what leapt out was the transformation of the physical landscape. Across the very period where I, on the ground as a ‘visitor’, was most aware of the decline in the degree to which students were genuinely ‘accommodated by colleges, there had been a massive investment in high quality architect-designed ‘accommodation. Once again sarcasm had become a condition of truth.

6

IN WHICH THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM IS BEGUN IN EARNEST WITH A CONSIDERATION OF THE FE STUDENT AS UNRECONSTRUCTED AND UNACCOMMODATED

"Worst of all, the schools are using these ideas to keep nonconforming youth: blacks, the politically disaffected, and the economically disadvantaged, among others—in their place. By taking this tack, the schools have become a major force for political conservatism at a time when everything else in the culture screams for rapid reorientation and change." (Postman, 1970: 9)

The abstract for my assault on the premise that better accommodation means better 'accommodation' states:

In his seminal essay "Building Dwelling Thinking", the philosopher Martin Heidegger argues for a relationship between ideas about 'dwelling' and 'building', suggesting "Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build" (Heidegger, 1971: 160). He suggests that the task is "to trace in thought the nature of dwelling" and to ask the question: "what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?" (Heidegger, 1971: 161). In contemporary post-compulsory education the most demonstrative sign of investment in recent times has been an investment in 'building' and this chapter to some extent is an attempt to "to trace in thought the nature of dwelling" to explore the extent to which high quality accommodation is genuinely accommodating.

Taking these observations as a starting point, this chapter develops a critique of recently-built FE colleges in Birmingham and the Black Country.

The guiding principle of our influential 2018 collection, *Identity and Resistance*, dubbed "vibrant, political, theoretically and critically charged" and 'from the patch'" was in fact a paper I published with Ben Andrews in the peer-reviewed journal *Metal Music Studies.* That paper was about the inappropriacy of well-meant attempts to accommodate the musical sub-culture Heavy Metal and its adherents within enclaves/ archives/ sanctuaries which also doubled up as places to take Metal seriously: the focus was on the attempts Birmingham (and the wider post-industrial Midlands) has made, and continues to make, to depict itself as 'The Home of Metal'. That paper was prefigured by Barthes' classic statement of the principle of myth as alibi, as ever-revolving turnstile: "I am not where you think I am: I am where you think I am not" (Barthes, 1972: 122). Here also the situation of a Further Education sector occupied by a neoliberalism impatient to co-opt the world.

However, the other prompt proved even more prescient and this was metaphorical since the paper also started 'on the heath', indeed a particular heath:

"At the very centre of Shakespeare's King Lear, both literally and figuratively, stands 'the Heath' and in the centre of that a hovel which Lear enters in an act of debasement/humility and cleansing. He has shortly before encountered its 'proprietor', a wretched soul, the self-styled 'Poor Tom o' Bedlam and seen through this example something of what we might be, an image of "un-accommodated man". When he emerges he is changed utterly, yet, as Poor Tom (actually the nobleman Edgar in a paper-thin disguise) declares "there is method in his madness". (Bennett & Andrews, 2015:200)

Exploring this as a spatial metaphor, an issue of inappropriate occupation/ appropriation and accommodation worked very well for this outlaw 'anti-genre, conceived pejoratively, in antagonism, that 'Fuck you' vibe". However, in a period of conspicuous new builds in FE, it also prompted a potential reconsideration of how the contemporary student, whatever their subcultural allegiance, was being accommodated in an age of accountability and austerity which appeared also to be renegotiating the identities of their teachers. At the time, the Black Country was alive with talk of migration plans and it seemed strangely appropriate that when like Lear they found themselves in transit between relative hovels and relative palaces that many teachers could easily feel the resonance of Lear's despairing plea: "Who is it can tell me who I am?" And perhaps some were also inclined to pre-empt the Fool's reply whispered in the disturbed atmosphere of mistrust defining the times by their own anxiety and /or critical grasp: "Lear's shadow".

This was also a project driven by my work on the new mythologies and if "the Home of Metal seems to embody the 'mythic', par excellence", what of education which Peim had already visited as "the master-myth of our time… a series of specific myths in a turbulent system of differences" (Peim, 2012: 32). The Heavy Metal paper conceives the sub-genre partly historically but also socially and politically as a kind of industrial folk music spectrally providing anthems for a doomed generation of failed factory fodder in post-industrial landscapes that Owen Hatherley has identified as "a new kind of bleak" (Hatherley, 2012). These places are entirely those that 'deserve' a Newbuild™ or at least have been given one:

"Something has happened to them. They have become dependent. At some point they had industry, and then they lost it… They are not standing on their own two feet." (Hatherley, 2012: 37)

Hatherley is concerned that these inner-city post-industrial landscapes have been exposed to a new kind of (almost ironic) 'regeneration', which rather than recovering what was already there, has uprooted and replaced it, at best "preserving it in the suspended imagination of a heritage 'curation'"(Andrews & Bennett, 2015: 201). This may be a fate worse than death. Thus the heavy (and ugly) materiality of the post-industrial cityscape is superimposed with "the new immaterial economy" and the industrial is transformed into a set of memorial poses . The Newbuild™ fits beautifully into this notion of regeneration, though it is as likely to be reaching outside regional identities into a futuristic hyperreality. One way to read this is via Lefebvre's ideas about the production of space and the vexed issue of who might own and use it. Lefebvre finds a better creative return from unappropriated, unowned spaces created and then overlooked by late capitalism's acquisitive, yet progressively desperate expansions, arguing that "the concept of space links the mental and the cultural, the social and the cultural"(Andrews & Bennett, 2015: 202). This overlaps with Rancière's ideas about the "distribution of the sensible", which "reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which the activity is performed" (Ranciere, 2006: 12). For Rancière there is "an aesthetics at the core of politics" which determines "what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time"(ibid). For Rancière, the radical job is to establish "a debate's conditions of intelligibility", and this true even when the debate is being entered out there across the landscape of the conurbation by 'cathedrals of learning'.

In search of monuments of unaging intellect

"The Spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (Debord, 1967).

This debate was enjoined in the *Identity and Resistance* project appropriately by practitioners, largely indeed a community of practice/ partnership of teacher educators. As the question was going to be about how teachers in FE might have agency, it was important for them to be front and centre. In the context of the politics of austerity, managerialism had become an orthodoxy in college cultures and with it a neoliberal consensus: "Epistemology, economic strategy, and moral code rolled into one" (Tuck 2014: 326).

As such, a context was shaking the sector with budgetary cuts more stringent than in any other sector of education so the premises on which teaching and learning had been progressively deprofessionalised became increasingly exposed (Smith & O'Leary, 2013). As surveillance was extended to teachers as well as students and the reform of GCSE and A level took on a retrogressive tone, according to one reviewer: "although it may seem to engage in a series of discussions that have been ongoing for some time [the book] updates and upturns some of that discussion mapping the possibilities for exciting and challenging new directions" (Dennis, 2020).

Although the collection did intend, like Carol Taylor in her recent work on HE teacherliness, "to find or, rather, hold onto and cherish, an educative space from which to contest perceptions that the intensification of market conditions in higher (cf further) education inevitably brings a deformation and derogation of teaching and learning relationships"

(Taylor, 2016: 231), my personal intentions went beyond this. I was determined that my resistance, across a broader project of writing would be made of ‘sterner stuff’ where deconstructing the mythic qualities of the neoliberal faux consensus was to be no mere intellectual conceit or sleight-of-hand. Fisher (2009: 17) in his account of ‘capitalist realism’ argues that “emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a 'natural order', must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency” but the important question concerns where practically this process starts. In Rancière’s terms, “I didn't want to work on a philosophical theme: I wanted to work on a practice of thinking” (Rancière, 2016: 7)

Ultimately this becomes focused increasingly in my work on the job of returning the human participants (teachers and students alike) to their central position redeeming even the travestied ‘learner’ tag that has sought to disorientate and cajole and aspiring to Illich’s ideal: “unhampered participation in a meaningful setting” (Illich, 1971: 28). This involves a patient restoration of the practice of equality, seeing it “as an axiom to be verified”(Rancière, 2010: 5) through the conscious dismantling of structural elements of “the particular inequality that normal pedagogical logic orchestrates” (op. cit.: 4) This kind of practice is benefitted greatly by the right kind of context, indeed Thomas (2012: 6) has suggested that “if context is wrong, learning doesn’t happen”, which suggested that the kinds of places that FE happens in were bound to be important. What might places which can facilitate “what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself” (Rancière, 1991: 39) look and feel like?

They would clearly be spaces which would realise Biesta’s desire for participants to “say who they are and where they stand” (Biesta, 2005: 62), teachers and students alike for if the

former are not free what chance is there for the latter? Of course it is impossible to ignore the tenor of these hypermodern times where "a sense of insecurity has invaded all of our minds" (Lipovetsky 2005, 13) and FE has decamped into vain citadels that are not walled, incongruous architectural novelties divorced from any purpose. However, this often undermining uncertainty does not excuse us from what Taylor (2016: 2) persistently reminds us is our professional obligation: regarding a collaborative praxis "as informed, committed action which embodies certain ethical qualities oriented to improving the relations of those involved". This will need more than cleaning the channels, for as Peim makes clear, the problem implicit in "the gift of education… an offer that you cannot refuse" is that "for certain segments of the population it is also, at the same time, an offer you can't accept" (Peim, 2012: 38). Entering a system where you are identified only as "being in need of reorientation, salvation and realignment" (ibid) is a dystopian experience, wherein the notion that every learner counts translates quickly into 'every learner is counted and accounted for'. This is Žižek's waking nightmare of a "society of pure meaningless historical experience", "(o)f a society without history" (Žižek, 2005). When the whole national educational 'project' ("correlated with the great economic national project") is principally a form of "population management", producing "the distribution of identities within and for the social division of labour", then something has to change.

In 2018 we risked the term 'identity', putting it in the book's title and negotiated it throughout the book. Perhaps now we might prefer 'agency', although for researchers (which teachers primarily are) Peim talks about, "addressing one's own subjectivity… objectification of the subjective" (Peim, 2018: 19), acknowledging the central part played by ones 'thrown' identity. In Ranciere's sense the book is partly, indeed chiefly, a collection of scenes

constructed by participants who are defined in their participation as practitioners but also writers and commentators, which means subjects in their own right (write). This process of 'subjectivization in words' is a principal method of equality of which allowing access is merely the first act: ""Subjectivization firstly occurs in the sense of taking the floor and speaking, that's the exercise of a capacity that was not acknowledged in the name of a subject who isn't one" (Rancière, 2016: 72). Rancière refers to this as a kind of 'breaking and entering' which becomes "a practical refutation of the hierarchical opposition between argued speech and the noisy voice" (Rancière, 2016: 72) Elsewhere, he refers to the famous interview Foucault did with Deleuze about canvassing the views of prisoners, insisting that "what matters isn't simply the fact that prisoners speak for themselves and aren't spoken for by spokespeople; it's the fact that people who didn't speak now speak and that these people who didn't speak have a theory about prison" (op. cit.: 22). Likewise the projects I have been working on for twenty years (and still am - this is central to the chapter I have just finished writing for our *Murder of English* project) are always concerned with speaking and writing in this sense and removing obstacles to their free employment. Such obstacles typically include curriculum, assessment, institutions and teachers! Unimpeded this process becomes that which Rancière describes as "the political transition from mutism to speech […] made using words that aren't yours that already exist, the subversive act being appropriation of those words" (Rancière, 2016: 73). What is required is a context that encourages agency, which might just be making you feel welcome and validated merely by being here so that you might think your personal experience worth somebody else's time. This is not just about some loose commitment to self-expression but to an "appropriation of speech that allows you to tell your personal experience differently, to subjectify daily experience and phrasing in a language that is no longer the language is everyday life or work"(ibid). In this way the

community does become the curriculum and their weavings (texts) become the course text (and coarse *textus*) while the course conforms respectfully to its landscapes but still makes its mark, opening a vista of possibilities. Students here are workers whose texts are like any other:

"But after all I've always sort of worked like that, by demolishing the causal hierarchy twice over to bring out a sensible world that's unstable: on the one hand I took worker's texts as being the same as any other texts to be studied in their texture and their performance and not as expressions of something else (Rancière, 2016: 29).

All this has implications for the taken-for-granteds of contemporary education, for example the division of teaching and learning into levels. Rancière's refusal to accept divisions into levels (advanced, intermediate etc) cuts across most conventional structures and makes this opinion both admirable and problematic: "In my courses I often have people of all different levels in the belief that each student does what he or she can do and wants to do with what I say." (Rancière, 2017: 116)

Our collection of Lears did take the floor, an aspect of the project that was well-received, to "speak of a beleaguered experience, about struggling to maintain an identity they own and connect it to a role they recognise, while external forces attempt to wrestle agency away from them". The battle for their souls though was fought with hearts and minds, hinging on the courage to realise that the performative repetition of acts is immanent capable of resequencing. Though Shakespeare's Lear is engaging with a radical humanism fuelling a broader recovery of forgotten values and cultural paraphernalia, our contributors have sought identities that are connected to others: to their students, to their colleagues inside and outside of their work settings. This too has offered access to currently unfashionable

ideas, for example of the collective or 'fraternity' that Badiou (2007: 101-2) writes about: "an affirmation of themselves through their relations with others: their students but also other staff – possibly at departmental level, or with individual allies in the workplace; or even, as in the case of this book, with others of like mind outside the institution" (Bennett & Smith, 2018: 12).

The state of dwelling in our precarious age

"Days are where we live" (Larkin, *Days*)

'*Character building: how accommodating is the FE Newbuild™?*' is certainly part of this 'fraternal' recognition but also a first tranche of my deconstructive desire to open up the belly of the beast by exposing the potential pathology of the corporate institution by exploring the Heideggerian premise that 'inhabiting' is inextricably bound up with 'being' and therefore with those developments of human potential sometimes called 'learning'. In proposing that we might 'work'/'learn' best when best accommodated and 'most at home', the chapter subjects the Newbuild™ to a killing with kindness. In fact in some ways the chapter attempts to answer Heidegger's (1971: 161) question: "what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?", although within a context sorely tested by the philosopher's exacting standard: "Only if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build" (Heidegger, 1971: 160).

If the German poet Hölderlin is to be believed and "man dwells poetically", there is plenty to explore as the chapter suggests: "It may be that this ur-act of 'inhabiting' is inextricably bound up with those developments of human potential sometimes called 'learning'"(Bennett & Smith, 2018: 14). However, on closer examination I tend to find a little less than meets the eye for while "these building 'projects' project" and "These 'grand designs' attest to the

significance of PCE in our time" they seem disturbingly out of step with the human proportions implicit in Heidegger's earlier formulation. Standing within these literally monumental constructions and staring into the towering atria, the human is all too easily lost to a feeling closer to 'awe' which may be a better guide to their significance: Debord (1967: 24) does well to remind us that "The spectacle is the flip side of money". My argument casts doubts on the repeated claims of governments to be in this way 'investing' in education, if what is created depersonalises the process or appears to be for somebody other its student body. In a sector beset by underfunding and mass production, the Newbuild™ might be there to prove that nothing is wrong, indeed the future is spectacularly here.

If the project of FE has traditionally been to offer students a 'second chance', reinforced in a different key by the presence of a cohort 'required' to continue their unsuccessful educational journey, then these monumental structures are difficult to read from the point-of-view of the 'hard to reach'. As the chapter quips, "They certainly have 'volume' but can they hope to find an appropriate 'pitch'?" (Bennett,2018: 98) Surely. they are not intended to overawe the ambitions of the adult learner? I referred too to the 'wretched sinner' and the medieval cathedral, which at least was more clearly about power and hierarchy, "an uncompromising and uncompromised path to salvation" (op. cit.: 99). This is not an easy jibe against the posturings of power, but rather a concern for the way power is exercised. If the built environment constitutes, in Foucault's sense (1995: 23), "techniques possessing their own specificity in the more general field of other ways of exercising power", what exactly is going on in the monumental Newbuild™?

My hypothesis that the Newbuild™ as "a form of visibility" is involved in a public conversation about education which reveals much about the functions and priorities of contemporary

education, has hardly been damaged by the subsequent pandemic. This tragedy has proved ominous too for the town centre campus, exposing the Newbuild™ as partly just another half-emptied tower block. The desperation of senior managers to repopulate these places in the face of the clear success of remoter forms of learning tells its own story, not least that this is not about learning. Lockdown and social distancing reinforce the absence of a 'college', the community of scholars (teachers and students), a network of relationships, collectively imagined rather than an executive decision, no longer a convincing manifestation of the corporate 'structure', writ large in the landscape. The time is here for a rethink with these 'interesting spaces' finally being asked to better 'accommodate' their 'learners'. This may be a call to colleges to act more significantly as local learning 'hubs', offering places to meet and support with equipment and other resources. As ever circumstance had made a much greater dent in the credibility of the Newbuild™ than I could have done. Then I wrote of "colonial warehouses which, with their decorated facades and impressive designations (India House, Orient House)" giving no outward indication of their role in "population management" and of the New Build™ epitomising "the neo-liberal agendas of FE's recent past: ask not what your college can do for you, rather ask what you can do for your college" (Bennett & Smith, 2018: 102). These may indeed be places to learn but only if they are not places where learning is 'contained' or even 'delivered'. I said then that what they must be was "places in which learning and knowledge are discovered, produced and created irrespective of the posturings of policy and patronage"(ibid): This is more true now even than then! In the next episode, I take this argument into the heart of the classroom.

IN WHICH FURTHER DECONSTRUCTION OCCURS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM AS CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT IS EXPOSED AS A MYTH AND CONTROL IS SUPERSEDED

"The multiple must be made". (Deleuze & Guattari 2004: 8)

My chapter, *Why We Should Never Be Classroom Managers* (Bennett, 2019) concerns the myth of classroom management:

This chapter offers a genealogical account of the issues surrounding 'classroom management' as manifest in schools, the Education and Training sector and in Teacher Education departments. Genealogy here is one of Foucault's methodological 'weapons' for flushing out assumptions; claims about what is right and what is wrong and judgments based on second order political positions. It does not believe that history is going somewhere or indeed has come from anywhere, but it does seek to identify the contingent events which may have prompted one course of action over other possibilities (Kendall & Wickham 1999: 29-31). In 2014 Ofsted published a report*, Low-level disruption in classrooms: below the radar*, which underlined the degree to which a neoliberal, retrogressive agenda had gripped English education. This 'survey report looking into the nature and extent of low-level disruptive behaviour in primary and secondary schools in England' was widely reported with the headlines suggesting that 'pupils are potentially losing up to an hour of learning each day in English schools because of this kind of disruption in classrooms' (Ofsted 2014: 5).

An unfortunate by-product of Gove's ruinous curriculum reforms, which, for example, addressed 'teaching to the test' by making tests more important, was the resurfacing of all

manner of other discredited educational practices. This was partly facilitated by an appeal to tradition that paradoxically denied the significance of historical context as if these transplanted ideas were somehow 'transcendent', beyond history or perhaps without it? Later in this commentary we will be reminded of Richard Hoggart's savage critique of fifties education in its time, which also reaches back to a hundred years of criticism of this thoroughly mistaken academic model. This is about the 'context' without which learning does not happen. It would be just as foolhardy to think you could transplant "high-performing" education systems like those of Finland and Shanghai.

In fact Gove's model, ironically aided by a student of early modern history, is colonialist in its character, although this is colonisation in reverse: the imposition of a set of chauvinistic, nationalistic and pseudo-academic procedures without any reference to those who were to be educated in this way. This act of occupation required no negotiation, A level reforms were opposed for example by all of our elite universities but resistance would need teachers to act as the occupying force and teachers are all too aware of context and culture and the real concerns and needs of students. It was all too easy in this way to see the coming catastrophe for at a moment when curriculum needed to be more responsive to the contemporary learner, it suddenly took 'responsive' to be a sign of weakness and committed instead to a package of eternal truths. This was a conscious triumph of the 'academic' over the 'everyday' and of the 'general' over the 'specific'.

<u>Believing is Seeing</u>

"How many times can a man turn his head, pretending he just doesn't see" (Dylan, *Blowin' in the Wind*)

What is being rejected in these reforms, which is why I consider the approach at best pseudo -academic, is evidence and particularly theory. To ignore pretty much everything that has happened in Western philosophy for fifty years is one thing, missing the impact of the digital age is risible. You might wave away Berardi's image of the hypermodern individual as 'a smiling, lonely monad who walks in the urban space in tender continuous interaction with the photos, the tweets, the games that emanate from a personal screen' (Berardi, 2015: 193) as a 'suitable case for treatment' but to pretend that nothing much has changed because you wish it had not is criminal. Lipovetsky offers an interesting place to start, unless you see the following as a set of maladies which can be cured by better 'telling and control:

'Hypermodern individuals are both better informed and even more deconstructed, more adult and more unstable, less ideological and more in thrall to changing fashions, more open and easier to influence, more critical and more superficial, more sceptical and less profound.' (Lipovetsky 2005: 5)

Whether or not the curriculum starts here (and now), it has to face up to the fact that this will be part of the landscape through which it travels. Teaching a course, a teacher has no alibis, no elsewhere at his disposal. Faced with a curriculum that is apparently 'good for them' without ever having been 'for them' at all and which offers more content and therefore less time for talking, thinking and building relations, the temptation is that if you can't join them, beat them!

At this point, there is admittedly no great enthusiasm for the return of corporal punishment, but there are plenty of teachers teaching ordered groups of advantaged kids, whose informed self-interest at least understands that a bad curriculum is better only for the advantaged! On this basis, these kids are at least prepared to sit through the sorry rituals of

disengagement, those with less reason to be cheerful will probably say so. In true full-blooded Foucauldian irony, although this is the theory they are keen to ignore, the field is then turned over the gurus of behaviour management who having supported a curriculum that has made these kids mad, are given the remit to tell you what to do about it. If only these kids would listen! Who can we blame? We could ask teachers to do a bit more and tie both them and teacher educators up for years by pretending behaviour is a problem that can be solved by 'strategies'.

One such academic 'guru'/ 'behaviour czar' is Tom Bennett, who shares a name with my autistic son and perhaps much else. His self-important war on 'low- level disruption' is actually a war on being young and alive, where fidgeting and asking too many questions constitutes aberrant behaviour (Bennett (T), 2016). One is reminded of Owen's poem, *Inspection*, about the soldier punished for being dirty on parade when the dirt, it turns out was blood, his own:

He told me, afterwards, the damnèd spot

Was blood, his own. 'Well, blood is dirt,' I said.

'Blood's dirt,' he laughed, looking away,

Far off to where his wound had bled

And almost merged for ever into clay.

'The world is washing out its stains,' he said.

'It doesn't like our cheeks so red:

Young blood's its great objection.

But when we're duly white-washed, being dead,

The race will bear Field-Marshal God's inspection.' (Wilfrid Owen, *Inspection*)

Reading Bennett's report of 2016, *Developing behaviour management content for initial teacher training* (ITT) is a profoundly dispiriting experience. Even the letter of recommendation reads as otherworldly: "The principal aim was to ensure that every teacher receives a core minimum of the best training available to them in order to be as classroom-ready as time and circumstances permit" (Bennett, 2016: 3). In my imagination I see Bennett as a quartermaster checking out boxes of teacherly ammunition before the onslaught of Zulus at Isandlwana in the twilight of empire and we all know what happened there (or don't we include defeats?) There is also a 'no contest' when it comes to a 'new 3 Rs of the behaviour curriculum' which in Bennett's version are predicated on 'behaviour training': i. Routines: ii. Responses: iii. Relationships (Bennett, 2016: 56): How palely they compare to those proposed by Thomas (2012: 12) who finds that "It is recognition, respect and identity that are most important for young people's success at school—not the identification of need, nor help". He also adds responsibility as a function of trust.

All this is partly a context for the chapter, 'Why We Should Never Become Classroom Managers', which was commissioned in the light of my long-held and often expressed opposition to 'behaviour management', particularly aimed at teachers. When many of my colleagues looked perplexed when I told them the title of the volume (*Classroom Behaviour Management in Further, Adult and Vocational Education: Beyond Control*), I reassured them that it was about problematising these issues and, in my chapter in particular, opposing the

current models. In the original proposal, the title of the chapter, *Behaviour in institutions: what lies beneath and around,* reflected a focus on a post-structuralist reading but evolved to become more combative and direct.

The chapter proceeds from a reading of the 2014 Ofsted published report already cited, which I consider represents much that is currently wrong about English education. It even prompted headlines about 'lost learning time', budgeted as five minutes per hour! The pandemic has only made these claims even more risible. More damningly it is also exposed as a very poor piece of research, at best 'hearsay' masquerading as data, where those whose behaviour is considered disruptive provide their parents with reasons to criticise teachers. I read the issue partly as a mythology since the simplicity (and sometimes simple-mindedness) of much of the debate around 'behaviour' and 'discipline' reminds us that 'myth acts economically' to render a reflective surface that doesn't need much looking into save narcissistically. Not for the first time, neoliberal educational initiatives are found to operate within a "society of pure meaningless historical experience", (Žižek, 2006), while simultaneously championing the study of 'real' history.

Working genealogically on a 'vast accumulation of source material' both documentary and experiential, the chapter attempts to read the subject in its broader contingent relationships and how these had purchase on the renegotiation of the role of teacher from educator to 'classroom manager'. It was important to turn over the basic sets of assumptions "about why children are in schools, how they should behave there and what role teachers play in these important rituals" (Bennett, 2019: 17) . I recount my own experience in 1994 of meeting the 'manager' sleight-of-hand face to face in FE when told that we were all managers now, a proposition we found preposterous and said so. In 2020, understanding the teacher as a

technician of ‘classroom management’ and an adept manager of behaviour is a commonplace, though one which many teachers think compromises the teaching function. This explains my urgent need to write, to assuage the guilt of not opposing these issues earlier, when they were merely ridiculous. Since then this technical role has it seems become central, be it stealthily, to the reconstitution of the teacher as “a developer of human resources within the context of the industrial production market grade potential”, irreparably at odds with students, ironically reconstituted as ‘learners’ (Bennett, 2019: 17). Since publication these arguments have been confirmed by the response made to the cancellation of A level and GCSE exams: in most colleges teaching on exam courses stopped immediately and the students were learners no more!

It is clear with a little thought that the ‘classroom manager’ is a shock troop of a neoliberal dispensation, which Tuck (2014: 326) has compared to settler colonialism wherein undesirable elements are ‘managed out of their entitlements/ birth right”. What the pseudo-science of behaviour management really means is “the dispossession and erasure of the unworthy subject’ (Tuck 2014: 341) which amounts to an extension of the inequalities of educational outcomes though now with a better excuse. The need to resist has never been greater nor the need for vigilance in the context of the rationality and indeed reasonableness of much that is being proposed: Tuck (2014) calls out self-regulated learning by asking, as with self-service tills in supermarkets’, who is being served and/or is regulating in each case. In redefining the contemporary teacher around ideas of mastery and control, the reformers have reconstituted teaching and learning in terms of two kinds of discipline which Foucault shows are essentially the same: in controlling their charges and marshalling their subject knowledge, teachers show the self-discipline essential to their professional code of practice.

This is the moment we hear the key turn in the door once and turn once only and appreciate Eliot's economy: "We think of the key, each in his prison thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" (*The Waste Land*). The issue of not 'managing' is vitally important because it concerns the autonomy of teachers and because the whole process of progressive education depends on it: 'To emancipate an ignorant person, one must be, and one need only be, emancipated oneself' (Rancière 1991: 15)

In this context Foucault makes perfect sense when he points out that "Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)" (Foucault 1995:149), fostering both docility and productivity: the best/worst of both worlds. The chapter continues to call witnesses to these issues that "a centralised predetermined National Curriculum is unwilling and/or unable to address". Peim suggests that 'Education tells us both what are and, more disturbingly, what we should be' (Peim 2013: 33), while, rather than asking who our 'learners' are, we are expected to "list what they need to know and even more importantly plot how they are meant to develop so their progress can be monitored and managed" (Bennett, 2019: 20).

This is a chapter about creating the conditions for a feasible future, such that Berardi thinks has been lost by young people partly because of a failure of education to deal with the "lasting damage in the material structures of the world and in the social, cultural, and nervous systems of mankind' perpetuated by corporate capitalism and neoliberal ideology (Berardi 2011: 8). For Berardi we have failed to provide fundamentals like "an active culture, a vibrant public sphere and forms of collective imagination" (Berardi 2011: 9); instead we stress 'high risk' tests and manufacture fear. Reading Hoggart (1957: 297) more than sixty years on discussing a 'contemporary' 'learner' who 'tends to over-stress the importance of

examinations, of the piling-up of knowledge and of received opinion' and 'discovers a technique of apparent learning, of the acquiring of facts rather than of the handling and use of facts' is a galling indication of where managed learning takes us and it is a path paved with good intentions. Since 2010 we seem to have doubled down rather than come to our senses. The classroom manager is irredeemably a Foucauldian 'judge of normality' on whom "the universal reign of the normative is based" and which each individual" subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements (Foucault 1995: 304). Discipline is here a form of power which works through line of sight, not physical force. Foucault is also precise when it comes to 'examinations' (of all kinds) and the part they play in the 'management' of populations, pointing out that "'The exam turns people into analyzable objects and forces them within a comparative system' transforming 'the economy of visibility into the exercise of power' (Foucault 1995: 187). By being managed I continue to argue "we are made visible and disempowered : incorporated rather than accommodated" (Bennett, 2019: 13-14). I will return to Hoggart in earnest in Episode Nine.

8

IN WHICH TESTING IS PUT TO THE TEST AND MORE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT ARE CALLED INTO QUESTION CRITICALLY AND CREATIVELY.

“It is true that we don’t know that men are equal. We are saying that they might be. This is our opinion, and we are trying, along with those who think as we do, to verify it. But we know that this might is the very thing that makes a society of humans possible.” (Rancière 1991: 73).

" Since you're not here to learn anything, but to be taught so you can pass these tests, knowledge has to be organized so it can be taught, and it has to be reduced to information so it can be organized do you follow that? In other words this leads you to assume that organization is an inherent property of knowledge itself, and that disorder and chaos are simply irrelevant forces that threaten it from outside. In fact it's exactly the opposite.” (William Gaddis, *JR*)

Our chapter, *Making a bid for utopia*” comes from a two volume collection reflecting issues around student empowerment in HE: Mawani, S. & Mukadam, A. (Eds.) (2020) *Student Empowerment: Reflections of Teachers and Students in Higher Education.* The pitch of this two volume collection runs as follows:

Student Empowerment in Higher Education brings together the accumulated knowledge and experience of many accomplished teachers and students from higher education institutions around the world, and has much to offer those who are engaged in higher

education, as students, teachers or support staff. The authors offer personal reflections in teaching, learning, mentoring, assessment, hands-on activities, course design and student identities in higher education across the globe, supported by academic research and scholarship.

One of the many tales of Einstein's genius, which may therefore, of course, be apocryphal, records that the man whose brain Barthes mythologised suggested that, given an hour to save the world, he would spend the lion's share (55 minutes is quoted) defining the problem. Here is the great issue of assessment in context: we know what Einstein means but we operate a system dependent on answers rather than questions and most often memory rather than thought. Even the ur-Einstein myth, that he struggled at school and specifically in maths, which is largely untrue, plays into this paradox. In fact, as Brown clarifies in his book "Reflections on Relativity", Einstein's trouble with bad grades started when he reached university and was predicated on the tensions between the programmes he was being offered and the work he was interested in doing (Brown, 2020). The fact that the 'value' of the degree depended only on these 'validated' assessments meant Einstein was genuinely borderline and academic positions were found for every member of the graduating class in the physics department except him. Brown offers this as a kind of occupational hazard for anyone too interested in being an independent learner, noting that he "pushed along with his formal work just as much as he had to, and found his real education elsewhere" (Brown, 2020: 253). However, Einstein himself did recall that the "coercion" of being forced to take the final exams "had such a detrimental effect that… I found the consideration of any scientific problem distasteful to me for an entire year" (Brown, 2020: 253). And Brown admits

that “As soon as he’d been away from the coercive environment of academia long enough that he could stand once again to think about science, he resumed his self-directed studies” (Brown, 2020: 255). Rancière also reflects the experience of being, in Foucault’s terms, turned into an analysable object; “I also discovered the strange law of exams and competitions which is the ritualistic quality, both in terms of setting you up and then humiliating you” (Rancière, 2016: 2). As a teacher he was also aware that something better change: “Consequently I was forced to do the same hopeless courses that I'd sat through when I was young, since I didn't have time to come up with anything better” (Rancière, 2016: 15).

Richard Hoggart can give you more than a hundred years of this, both memorably rinsing our assessment-led system for which the initiate has been “trained like a circus-horse” (Hoggart 1957: 298) and finding an even more precise indictment from the philosopher Herbert Spencer fifty years before him. Spencer considers these models ‘fundamentally vicious in their manner’, which may for some be rigour with a vengeance but sadly serves only to ‘encourage submissive receptivity instead of independent activity’ (cited in Hoggart 1957: 298). Indeed, somewhere between these two points such educational wisdom was enshrined in the Norwood Report (1943) which informed the 1944 Education Act and stated quite simply:

“It is the task of the school to provide the goal and the stimulus, in the way most appropriate to it, without the aid of an external examination which pervades the consciousness of pupil and teacher […] “At present the examination dictates the curriculum and cannot do otherwise; it confines experiment, limits free choice of subject, hampers treatment of subjects, encourages wrong values in the classroom.”(Norwood, 1943: 32)

So much for high risk assessment:

“Originality is replaced by uniformity; the mind of the examiner supersedes that of the teacher; every effort is subservient to the examination, in order that a hall-mark, estimated by those to whom the pupils is an examination number, may be stamped upon a pupil on the result of single judgement on the examinable portion of his work at a particular moment.”(Norwood, 1943: 32)

In the year when exams were cancelled (2020), how surprising was it to read that “No one can examine better than the teacher, who knows the child; and a method of examination by the teacher, combined with school records, could be devised which would furnish a certificate giving information of real importance to employer or college or profession, and yet would preserve intact the freedom of the school and would rid teacher and pupil of an artificial restraint imposed from without” (ibid)?

My feeling is that there can be no sound justifications for formal assessment until something fundamentally changes at the heart of a system that favours throughput over exploration, cooperation and consolidation. This is rather the point Postman (1970) was making about the teaching of reading 50 years ago, the reasons for doing it must be rediscovered. Perhaps the pandemic might prove to be a watershed moment, relieving the occupation and offering redress to Virilio’s stark assessment of the way we learn now: “Whoever controls the territory possesses it. Possession of territory is not primarily about laws and contracts, but first and foremost a matter of movement and circulation” (Armitage, 2000).

Certainly 'learning' will need to be decommodified and, as Biesta powerfully argues, a language reclaimed for education: he is 'against learning' in the way that I want to be against assessment. We have allowed a redescription of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction in which it is "a commodity to be provided or delivered by the teacher or educational institution and to be consumed by the learner" (Biesta, 2005: 58). Biesta calls this 'the market model' and explains exactly why it has led us to a sorry state where value (and standards) reside in the market place and test scores determine the success of students, teachers and systems alike. Moreover, we are no longer able to engage in "an open, democratic discussion about education" (Biesta, 2005: 60). And this is deep-set, even universities increasingly conform to the inanities of learning outcomes and assessment objectives. Against this Biesta offers a brighter set of guiding lights: trust without ground, transcendental violence (teachers asking the difficult questions), and responsibility without knowledge: commitments not commodities. Trust is vital because there is no education possible until the learner is prepared to take a risk and this risk has nothing to with passing or failing high-risk assessments but the risk that:

"You won't learn what you wanted to learn… or that you will learn things that you couldn't have imagined that you would learn… or… that you will learn something that you rather didn't want to learn, something about yourself, for example." (Biesta, 2005: 61)

Ultimately, the greatest risk is that learning may have an impact on you, that learning may change you: assessment will only have validity when it incorporates itself into this project. Presently, assessment compromises the trust that is required if enough people are going to embrace risk, making the risk a consequence rather than an essential component and 'dromological' related to your position in some race outside that you never consciously

entered. The beauty of learning outcomes and assessment objectives is a fraudulent beauty because it delivers only a projection of learning, a simulation of experience as transaction. For, as Biesta points out "to suggest that education can be and should be risk free, that learners don't run any risk by engaging in education, or that 'learning outcomes' can be known and specified in advance, is a gross misrepresentation of what education is about" (Biesta, 2005: 61)

Re-establishing the Objectives of Assessment

"Nice day to start again" (Billy Idol, *White Wedding)*

Our chapter takes this as a starting point, when describing the attempts Victoria Wright and I made in *Making a Bid for Utopia* to modestly negotiate unhelpful assessment models. In the modular assessment we describe, there is also a complete commitment to bring 'transcendental violence' to any assumptions about learning and the acquisition of something 'external', "something which existed before the act of learning and which, as a result of learning, becomes the possession of the learner" (ibid). In our Masters module, *Extending Criticality* and our chapter our model of learning is explicitly understood as "responding to what is other or different, to what challenges, irritates and disturbs us, rather than as the acquisition of something that we want to possess" (Biesta, 2005: 62). This is Rancière's "radical point of departure" offering telling and interpreting and resisting explanation and understanding; stories for children and common minds. It is also a form of responsibility for "the subjectivity of the student, for that which allows the student to be a unique, singular being" (Biesta, 2005: 62) which has implications for our own subjectivity, that they can only come into presence if we do too. Emancipation starts with the teacher.

The chapter's title embodies both this commitment and our desire for change. The whole quotation helps to position the approach, it is from the auto-ethnographer Madison Spry (2016: 42):

"Making a bid for utopia is a temporal act. It considers the triumphs and transgressions of the past, articulating them in the present while conflating a possible hopeful futurity."

However, the chapter is not at all fanciful, it is largely an account of the process of negotiating systems and procedures in order to move assessment safely to a different position, inhabiting a different perspective and fulfilling a different role. It provides accounts of how ideas around a 'rhizomatic model of education' play out in practice, of how community became curriculum and how more schematic maps led to the discovery of other territories. It tells also of how we relaxed into it and offered trust without ground. Whether session, seminar or assessment, these are 'events', the purest form of educational encounter: they are proposed, advertised and then they happen and we trust they will. This equality is essential to both the module and the approach. The key is the flier; unassessed but every student buys into the game, now theirs as much as ours. This is coming into presence, the prompt I provide is for Pablo Fanque's Fair: "For the benefit of Mr. Kite, there will be a show tonight on trampoline" (The Beatles, *Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite*).

Rancière argues that "There are no madmen except those who insist on inequality and domination, those who want to be right" (Rancière, 1991:72).

Aware that "as subjects of education, assessment renders us 'discrete' both a part and apart," we compromise its 'dark greed' with collaboration since, as Madison points out, "We are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogue with others" (Madison cited in Spry, 2016:

30).’ And it is Madison who must have the last words here since she finds the perfect expression of our aspiration:

‘I keep my hands on the performance and my eyes on the theory. I am playful, but I am not playing. I do not appreciate carelessness. I pay attention. I do not let go or look away, because I have learned that all the meanings, languages, and bits of pain will come into clarity and utility like a liberation song. I need this clarity for the ones I love.’ (Madison cited in Spry, 2016: 176-177)

9

IN WHICH HOGGART IS REVISITED, RENEWED AND EXTENDED AS A MEANS OF RECONSTITUTING THE CURRICULUM PARADIGM.

"'Culture is Ordinary"' (Raymond Williams)

ANDREA: Unhappy the land that has no heroes

GALILEO: No, unhappy the land that needs heroes (Brecht, Life of Galileo)

Here Brecht speaks to many of the issues of this section. I used the exchange first to open a chapter I wrote on superhero movies for a Cultural Studies collection, which argued that these may indeed be troubling times:

"if Brecht's Galileo is correct then we may be living in an unhappy 'land', and in the original German '*unglücklich*' carries also the connotation 'unlucky', since across the opening years of this century we have been beset in film and on TV with a glut of super-hero 'products'". (Bennett, 2017: 81)

However, the resonances in this segment are rather different, both more varied and more contradictory, which is inevitable when the central issue is the challenges faced and largely avoided by contemporary forms of formal education in addressing the needs of working class education students, now referred to rather euphemistically as the 'less advantaged' or

'disadvantaged'. Of course the statistics for penetration of our best universities by young people from our poorest neighbourhoods has always been a cause for concern, much political intent and action with negligible results but perhaps most interesting are the accounts of those who did make the trek from 'nowhere' to the Russell Group, also slightly euphemistically dubbed 'research-intensive' universities. The common thread in these stories and absent from those of their 'more advantaged' classmates is the sense of being 'lucky' rather than 'worthy', while people who head organisations which might appear superficially to help them, like the Social Mobility Commission, merely tell them they must learn to be middle class (Maslen, 2019).

Setting Hoggart in a contemporary context

"Don't talk to me about sophistication, love, I've been to Leeds" (Harry Enfield)

Research is fairly clear that the attempts of society to address apparent working class underachievement in education are frankly abject in their failure, despite a massive investment of time, money, effort and ideas. However, we have been slow to let evidence stymie political ideology. A survey of research of 2010 listed common approaches within education's 'winless run', most of which are still regularly recycled as feasible interventions. They included targeting high achievers, 'raising aspirations' and prestigious universities, but all shared an important fault, "a focus on attainment, rather than engagement with education (Perry & Francis, 2010: 3)

The focus on 'aspirations' has been a favourite of both major UK political parties, though the need for specified groups to '#aim higher' begs a multitude of questions. Peim (2012: 33) is scathing about what he dubs the myth of social salvation, which he considers education's "most sinister motif" since "as the sociologists have been telling us for years now, the

apparatuses of education are clearly designed to reproduce inequality". However, a more bruising retort is providing by the skinhead in Tony Harrison's epic of working class identity, *V*:

Aspirations, cunt! Folk on t'fucking dole
'ave got about as much scope to aspire
Above the shit they're dumped in, cunt, as coal
Aspires to be chucked on t'fucking fire. (Tony Harrison, *V*)

Morwena Griffiths has suggested that "For any group of people to get an education of their own, the first need is to have a say and be listened to" (Griffiths, 2003: 34). She is writing about Special Needs and Inclusion Studies but for me also signalling a much more general need for 'involvement' that must mean more than 'compensation' or even 'access'. This is partly about honouring Rendón's insistence that "past experience, language, and culture [should be regarded] as strengths to be respected and woven into the fabric of knowledge production and dissemination, not as deficits that must be devalued, silenced, and overcome" (Rendón, 1992: 63) and Rancière's desire for the student to be a 'searcher' on their own account.

This struggle which is absolutely not about 'meeting needs' is played out in agonising intensity in Harrison's poem as the clever working class kid, saved from Beeston by Leeds Grammar and Leeds University, contemplates the places he will remember all his life in the crisis of the demotic desecration of his parents' grave. The scene is dramatic. Beeston Hill cemetery overlooks Leeds and stands adjacent to Elland Road, where "Leeds United play and disappoint their fans weeks after week", one reason the graves are daubed with 'versus vs' as well as FUCK. CUNT and SHIT.

Contemplating the working class perpetrator, indeed summoning him, Harrison has a familiar project, contemplating redemption. Finding a UNITED on the gravestone, he hopes to provide a higher meaning. There is almost a teacherliness in his attempts to regale the delinquent with his own feeble acts of rebellion to which the skin contemptuously replies: “Yeah, ah bet yer wrote a poem, yer wanker you!” All this is building to the point of this ‘strange meeting’ for Harrison, the poem and our understanding of what it really means to consult your constituency. After an extended heated exchange, the poet calls upon the vandal to claim his work , having faced the ultimate provocation:

Yer've given yerself toffee, cunt. Who needs
Yer fucking poufy words. Ah write mi own.
Ah've got mi work on show all ovver Leeds
Like this UNITED 'ere on some sod's stone.

The climax though is thoroughly transformative, underlining what is at stake in the broadest sense:

He took the can, contemptuous, unhurried
And cleared the nozzle and prepared to sign
The UNITED sprayed where mam and dad were buried.
He aerosolled his name. And it was mine.

The rest of the poem is a mature reflection on the consequences of this imaginative encounter. Critically Rancière would describe it as a ‘scene’, “a theoretical entity peculiar to what I call a method of equality because it simultaneously destroys the hierarchies between the different

levels of reality and discourses and the usual methods for judging whether a phenomenon is significant" (Rancière , 2016: 67). A scene is "a small machine in which the maximum number of meanings can be condensed around the central issue which is the issue of the distribution of the sensible world" (ibid). Harrison's reflections are personal and philosophical, emotional and political but know for certain that "the superiority that someone might manifest is only the fruit of as tenacious an application to working with words as another might show to working with tools; that the inferiority of someone else is the consequence of circumstances that didn't compel him to seek harder" (Rancière , 1991: 71). And it is perhaps more apparent to the poet, that "particular application of the power common to all reasonable beings, the one that each person feels when he withdraws into that privacy of consciousness where lying makes no sense"(ibid). Also the knowledge that "man is not born to a particular position, but is meant to be happy in himself, independently of what fate brings," might perhaps hold out a better hope for the education of the 'less advantaged' than the hand-me-downs offered by ever newly inappropriate versions of a National Curriculum that confirmed their disenfranchisement from 1988. Rather this by far it seems than properly exploring what Perry and Francis' review of research suggested were largely untried approaches, particularly "a focus on educational engagement and ownership by working-class young people" and the "valuing of the existing knowledges of working-class young people (Perry & Francis, 2010: 3).

Myths of origin and signs of reality

"History is the nightmare from which I am trying to awaken" (Joyce, *Ulysses*)

All of this made the Hoggart reimagining a very obvious next thing to do, since it potentially combined a consideration of the contemporary state of the working class with debates about

curriculum and method. Moreover, writing as I am in Black History Month, it gave pause for thought around other significant curricular blindspots and perhaps more simply, the identification of significant individuals, we might call them 'heroes' to suggest that on Brecht's terms we are not entirely 'happy'. This was poignant for me because the work I was reconsidering was a key text from one of my own intellectual heroes. Richard Hoggart was regularly on TV and radio when I was growing up as a working class kid in the Black Country, rather interested in ideas. Listening to him demonstrated to me that you could be intellectual in any voice that was your own and that it was possible to talk about literature with a regional accent. In my first college teaching job, I was reassured to find among the fairly meagre departmental assets, a hardback copy of Hoggart's book on Auden (I still have it): it struck me as a good omen. Hoggart was also connected in my mind with Raymond Williams, another transitional figure for me whom I read avidly and have been reading ever since. Williams made me rethink or indeed think about how literature could be understood within the patterns of everyday life and its structures of feeling , those "affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (Williams, 1977: 132) which become increasingly significant in our version of the digital age. Way back at the start of my career, the open access sixth form college I worked at had an exchange with the third best sixth form college in Cambridge. In what I can only describe as a culture shock, I took a minibus load of working class kids from the industrial Midlands to the tended lawns of Cambridge where their first port of contact with their Cambridge contemporaries was to amaze them with the UB40s they were using to claim benefits. This was a genuine cultural exchange with our students also bringing them up to speed on why the Brummie perpetrators of 'One in Ten', 'The Earth Dies Screaming' and 'Signing Off' were so called. They took us punting on the

Cam while we, when they came to us, took them to the recently opened museum devoted to our industrial past.

These experiences are certainly factors in the Hoggart project, prompted by my co-author Julian MacDougall's suggestion that *The Uses of Literacy* might be a fertile place for another reimagining, which effectively meant a reconsideration or re-evaluation of a text in a contemporary context. I was convinced immediately, insisting that we maintained Hoggart's structure and chapter titles to keep us focused on the original as well as its implications. Actually, the long term encounter with my hero turned out to be slightly less palatable than I had thought, largely because of the offhand misogyny that I encountered in nearly every chapter and his shocking condescension towards anything new and most things young. Though it is methodologically flimsy, *The Uses of Literacy* effectively founded British Cultural Studies and there is much still in the book to build on not least his dismissal of the very academic models of education that have enjoyed a post-mortal disinterment in the last decade. The absence of any consideration of the female experience, potential or indeed presence is inexcusable and that is not to disown Hoggart for being a product of his times. His misogyny came both from his historical context and inevitably his social background. Despite this, Lynsey Hanley and Kate Pahl whose work has done much to begin to redress this imbalance and on much more significant methodological footings have both testified to the continuing importance of Hoggart. Writing in the week of Hoggart's death in 2014, Hanley who also wrote a new introduction to the Penguin Classics edition confessed that:

"My intellectual development continues to be defined by his writing, and all I can say to anyone who has yet to read his work is: do it now. We still need voices like his to articulate what is

wrong, right now, with an official and media language that wilfully ignores the malign effects of class and poverty." (Hanley, 2014)

Similarly, in the Afterword to our book Pahl shows great affection for the innovative qualities of the work and its usefulness. Hoggart came alive for her in her work in Rotherham "amongst the terraced houses beloved by Hoggart". According to her, "His work resonated for me when I sat in the families' terraced houses, close to where George Orwell's housewife hung out her washing (Orwell, 1937) and listened to stories of neighbourliness and locality" (in Bennett, McDougall & Potter, 2020: 131). She also says that "Hoggart's work is good to think with" and that "it felt like a new kind of writing" which I entirely agree with: I also recognise its methodological weakness because its method is mine also. It is discursive, literary in its style and determined to tell a good story: at worst almost picaresque!. This perceived weakness is also, for Pahl a strength: "Hoggart's work, when I encountered it, was more lived, it was more partial and it was more felt than the many academic books in the tradition of the New Literacy Studies (e.g. Street, 1993)" (Bennett, McDougall & Potter, 2020:132)

<u>No More Heroes</u>

"The future is not an obvious concept, but a cultural construction and projection" (Berardi, 2011: 12)

The final manifestation of the hero motif in this part of the work comes from the work of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, whose darkest and most accomplished work, *Heroes* (2015), selects for us the heroes of the end of history: suicide bombers and serial killers, committers of public atrocities. What links these is the sense of the implications of lower-level socio-political atrocities

perpetrated by globalisation on society's nervous system, the networks of support and protection that lessen anxiety and insecurity, which has resulted in a generation robbed of an idea of the future (Berardi, 2011). For Berardi, the future is always inscribed in the present and therefore a failure to acknowledge this, as education has failed to, looking instead into the past for models, is potentially catastrophic. Central here in my work is the implication of a curriculum fixated on 'facts' and technicalities and intent on a history that is blandly picturesque: an education that protests its apparently neutrality a little too much. With a focus on upskilling those whose futures have otherwise been compromised by neoliberal policies so that they might more efficiency mirror, the flexible model of 'casual' employment that best suits the financial hierarchy, a critical education can be rationed to those who really need it. At some level this is elegant but it not only ignores the traditional values of liberal education and liberal democracy but also the rainy, stony world that it has otherwise insulated itself from.

Although Berardi is a marginal voice, particularly in the theory-phobic context of English education, Hoggart has been continually in print for over sixty years. Moreover, as we have seen across the work considered here, this critique goes forcefully back into the twentieth century. If you want to really be alarmed, read Neil Postman's polemic "The Politics of Reading" which on the fiftieth anniversary of its original publication seems as 'contemporary' as ever. Like Berardi, Postman implores educators to embrace the contemporary life of all of its inhabitants, rather than clinging on to an archaic limiting literacy-based culture that maintains certain kinds of hierarchy. It is this, he argues, which sets limits of citizens who are offered a literacy based on their status and likely function because "it is probably true that in a highly complex society one cannot be governed unless he can read forms, regulations, notices, catalogues, road signs, and the like" (Postman, 1970:

Part of the controversy Postman caused was by indicting literacy projects aimed at urban Blacks which offered a debilitating level of literacy which prepared people only for low level jobs (think of a course called Amazon Warehouse English!). Postman's version is that "It is entirely possible that the main reason middle- class whites are so concerned to get lower -class blacks to read is that blacks will remain relatively inaccessible to standard-brand beliefs unless and until they are minimally literate" (Postman, 1970: 4). How pertinent is it to read that "It just may be too dangerous, politically, for any substantial minority of our population not to believe that our flags are sacred, our history is noble, our government is representative, our laws are just, and our institutions are viable"(ibid). This is 'empowerment on somebody else's terms, having a qualification that goes down to grade G [in old money] to unwittingly celebrate the degree to which this literacy is at least inappropriate to so many while claiming to 'accommodate' everyone. For those of us who think words might mean something, accommodate implies making room for people and their stuff and valuing both:

"Worst of all, the schools are using these ideas to keep nonconforming youth: blacks, the politically disaffected, and the economically disadvantaged, among others—in their place. By taking this tack, the schools have become a major force for political conservatism at a time when everything else in the culture screams for rapid reorientation and change" (Postman, 1970: 9).

Our failure to heed Postman's warnings or indeed embrace the immanent present because we have a curriculum haunted by the past has done little more than perpetuate Postman's description of an underclass with a minimal education but newly and differently empowered by social media so as to be in many ways beyond the control of the social system but not the

influence of the market. Interestingly the crises of the present time around 'Truth Decay' and the idea of 'post-truth', exploited by the arrogance of Trump and the crypto-anarchism of mavericks like Cummings, are crises of the mainstream media and the intellectual classes. Having failed to educate a generation, we cannot be surprised if they choose to educate themselves, both on and off the information superhighway. Negotiating this multiplicity with an impaired education that at best pretended there were discrete answers is bound to create an anxiety which leads to more primal allegiances.

This creates a divide that is predicated to some degree on levels of education, which even more markedly returns us to Hoggart's 'uz and them', making the educationally excluded even angrier at demonstrations on behalf of 'others'. The fact that schools and colleges were unable to provide the 'moderation' that education is meant to provide on account of the fact that 'education' is meant to be neutral, or perhaps neutered, may be the ultimate abdication of responsibility. With the stage free for chancers like Farage and Johnson, the temperature went up a couple of notches and anger boiled bloody and was spilled. All acts of 'extremism' have reference to the centre they are apparently extreme from, making them less like us. However, their 'going too far' is rarely comfortable since it often picks up the hard edge of antagonism and the language it employs. We must find another way.

<u>Literacy and its uses</u>

SPOONER: "All we have left is the English language. Can it be salvaged, that is my question?"

(Pinter, *No Man's Land*)

This, for all its faults, is Hoggart's project and ours in turn. In his willingness to listen to the rhythms and patterns of everyday life and in his withering condemnation of academic systems of education predicated on tests, Hoggart creates a context for this discussion. In the light of the latest attempts at 'levelling up', I have been thinking instead about a feasible alternative which coheres around the idea of inclusion. But rather than inclusion being about bringing those from the margins into the mainstream, particularly those 'without', impaired in one way or another, the new inclusion will be rather about giving all a stake in what is known in what is learned and in what is taught. This is involvement in the making of the curriculum, in that creation that Deleuze said we lacked and which he hoped might provide "resistance to the present". If being included means having your work considered as an explicit part of any course, as part of the resource of the course then commitments can be made to this which are as challenging as ensuring two female directors in every German boardroom. The Hoggart book is a significant step in the attempt to make a history of the present, to take seriously Chris Waugh's provocation that the classroom is not a place in which we prepare a life but a place where we go to luxuriate in the now!

My contributions to *The Uses of Media Literacy* frame the project with chapter 2 bringing to the fore Hoggart's methodology and style (they are sometimes interchangeable), his "consciously 'painterly' address, implicit in the chapter title, *Landscape with Figures*, the sense of a composition masquerading as investigative documentary" (Bennett, McDougall & Potter, 2020: 15). I also question Hoggart's hypothesis concerning the coming of massification, which he presents as toxic when it would be easier to argue that late fifties, sixties and early seventies proved an "unprecedented period of working class credibility and creativity such that for a short period northern working class accents were more desirable than a decent R.P" (ibid). The

problems were perhaps further down the line when the age of massification gave way to "something more fluid, globalised and digital, in the absence of requisite radical political settlement"(ibid).

This leads directly in the chapter to the issues of hypermodernity and the work of Berardi and Lipovetsky but Hoggart's concerns remain central to these other kinds of threat and confusion in the consensual hallucination that is cyberspace. There is a sense of place in Hoggart that holds him in good stead in the deterritorialized contexts of the future. Hoggart also recognises the psychological dimension, the damage that corporate capitalism and neoliberal ideology have wreaked "in the material structures of the world and in the social, cultural, and nervous systems of mankind" (Berardi, 2011: 8). This is Berardi but his conclusion confirms Hoggart's deepest fears for the result is the "absence of an active culture, lack of a public sphere, void of collective imagination, palsy of the process of subjectivation" (2011: 9). These are all things that Hoggart's 'literacy' can and will address if we reanimate its context. The matter remains cultural and historical (and naturally political) so that I imagine a reimagining of Hoggart's Hunslet to be "best done at dusk so that you could appreciate the transmigration from the persistent glow of foundry furnaces to the partly figurative firing of internet connections and synapses", providing yet more 'webs of significance'" (Bennett, McDougall & Potter, 2020: 18).

It is not difficult to read the working class in this way, as dispossessed and occupied, returned to reservations now the industrial revolution is finally over. What Hoggart clearly sees is a need for an education founded on critical thinking, on Rancière's model of 'telling and interpreting', which he believes was once supplied 'on tap' by the rich oral culture and was then pushed aside by the agencies of massification. This metanarrative sadly blinds him to potential of new largely oral

cultures driving contemporary mass or youth culture. Hoggart has theory but appears to ultimately lack faith. While he knows that "The working classes have a strong natural ability to survive change by adapting or assimilating what they want in the new and ignoring the rest" (Hoggart, 1957: 32), he cannot quite back their ability to do this: his preferred title was 'The Abuses of Literacy'. He is however reading society before most had even thought about it even if his picturesque portrayals, because essentially 'static' and intended to be observed, may ultimately pave the way for 'poverty porn'. Nevertheless, there is an implicit argument at work here that would add to the case ultimately for comprehensive education, predicated on the notion that "schools should reflect the communities within which they happened to be located' (Brighouse, 2002: 4). Here is a community that could provide a curriculum as any could. How a proper appreciation of a burgeoning popular culture would have helped here.

<u>The Great Song of Indifferentism</u>

"I don't mind if the government falls
Implements more futile laws
I don't care if the nation stalls
And I don't care at all" (Bob Geldof, *the Great Song of Indifference*)

My other contributions to the book constitute the end of the Hoggart project so, like Hoggart, I am attempting to see through the implications of both Hoggart's critique and our own. DJ Taylor described Hoggart's book as an "uncannily prophetic… masterpiece", which is an appreciation not so much of the gift of prophecy but rather of Hoggart's ability to critically evaluate his present times. What he raises in chapter 9, crisply

encapsulated in the key phrase 'scepticism without tension', is a key issue for the succeeding decades. How do you prevent a critical reflective approach from turning into an easy mistrust of everything, even the verifiably true? Hoggart is thus to an extent smelling 'truth decay' long before Rand hallmarked it. He also sees the dangers of consumerism, even, or perhaps especially, if it makes 'hedonism' available to more individuals. This, of course, betrays a position that is often moralistic and compromised by nostalgia which makes some of the writing feel like a natural history of the Hunslet habitat. Hoggart writes as a conservationist at heart and this prevents him adopting a feasible political position. This is partly what makes the work of his contemporary adherents like Lynsey Hanley so much more convincing, for she is able to declare of the council estate she grew up on in Birmingham, "Council estates are nothing to be afraid of unless you fear inequality" (Hanley, 2007; 5). Hanley knows she was lucky to escape, but this is not Hoggart's story: he seems rather to find solace in Michael Young's notion of the meritocracy, a telling critique turned *cause celebre*! (Young, 1973). He is as dismissive of those of low intelligence as he is of women with a scepticism as loose as any he bemoans.

Hoggart's instinct is for *terra firma* in the face of what he feels as fluid, uncertain and unprincipled. He could not be expected to see that in less than fifty years Virilio would be declaring the "programmed end of the 'hic et nunc' and the 'in situ'" (2000: 116), but we can and a failure to effectively act 'then' (to follow through with the project of comprehensive education, for example) must act as a spur for action now. As this digital path leads to populism and Trump, we must put aside the off-key examples and embrace the critique that continues to indict our project of mass education. Hoggart must be used rather than excused or, worse, ignored. What is required is the promotion of what Peim

calls “the thinking we do in contemplating the meaning of things in the larger sense”, which we are currently unprepared for because it “cannot be easily organized into a programme”(Peim, 2018: 236).

Here education needs to reclaim its place in the scheme of things by argument rather than entitlement in the way that ideally classroom teaching should post-pandemic. Hoggart too is essentially reopening the “ontological questions that put education itself into question” (Peim, 2018: 237), attempting to establish “‘What calls for thinking?’ and more actively what calls us to thinking?” Once again this is connected to the idea of having a stake in your education, not, as currently reconceived, as a programme of improvement. However, Hoggart is suspicious of equality because he reads it as a passive element promoting indifferentism, rather than the starting point and *sine qua non* of critical reflection.

Reading Hoggart as a mythologist on Barthes’ terms, we are partly also indicating the direction of our own ‘travel’, keen to promote the political act of unveiling as “a political act: founded on a responsible idea of language, mythology thereby postulates the freedom of the latter”(Bennett, 2020: 111). As his contemporary, Barthes could barely have written a better summary of Hoggart the mythologist than this generic description:

“The mythologist is condemned to live in a theoretical sociality; for him, to be in society is, at best, to be truthful: his utmost sociality dwells in his utmost morality. His connection with the world is of the order of sarcasm” (Barthes, 1972: 158).

The disconnection that this implies, which enables the critique must be repaired if these ideas are going to decisively involve (rather than redeem) those who never attend the banquet. This reconnection will not be easy or straightforward even in a world 'wired' through the web. Those calling for a media, even social media literacy that is technical and academic risk what Scott calls 'a literacy of the unreal and inauthentic' (Scott, 2016). He finds more interest in the wilfully disconnected, online somnambulists who find "within this withdrawal a form of resistance and a way of being" (Scott, 2016). If technology just provides new ways to do old things, then the future is bleak. When you have nothing to say, sometimes it is better to remain silent. As online learning seemingly strives to reproduce indiscriminately every aspect and nuance of the classroom, most of which are predicated on control, so the opportunity to try it another way seeps away. And though everybody knows what has been revealed and that nobody would sanely go back to what we had, those lessons can only be learned if those who have purchase on change are also 'woke'. Black Sabbath had this scenario word-perfect in their anthemic masterpiece , *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*:

"The race is run, the book is read, the end begins to show:
The truth is out, their lies are old but they don't want to know".

Addressing a new century typified by speed and Virilio's notion of the dromological is not the same as boarding a bandwagon: it may be a matter of an education that resists 'throughput' and chooses instead to spend its precious time more wisely providing people with what they want to learn. Lipovetsky's defence of the ephemeral is interesting in this

respect, if only because it challenges our own positionings on the Left and prods our own cultural prejudices. This is a proper challenge, the thought that “Through the pursuit of fashion people become complex selves, though this complexity differs radically from the interior soulful selfhood of the past” (Lipovetsky, 1994: ix). It also offers a more useful appreciation of the contemporary mind which it finds “better informed but also more disorderly, more adult but also more unstable, less subject to ideologies but also more dependent on fashions, more open but also more easily influenced, less extremist but also more dispersed, more realistic but also more fuzzy, more critical but also more superficial, more sceptical but also less meditative” (Lipovetsky, 1994: 11).

By comparison I find Hoggart always honest but also faithless, unable in Rancière’s sense to set his intelligence aside and allow things to be done by others in other ways. From Barthes we should have learnt that it is “not finally, the knowledge or the culture it conveys but the discursive forms through which we propose them” (in Sontag, 1993: 476). Hoggart finds more passion in Chapter 10 when he enters for a final symbolic time the ranks of the uprooted and anxious and sets out to set the record straight. Once again he is in the ring on behalf of clever working class lads like himself, there is no broader constituency. This is what my version of the chapter has to put right because this is a context where, in Butler’s memorable phrase, “those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (Butler, 1988: 522). The danger posed by Hoggart is implicit in Barthes’ comment that “normalised forms attract little attention” (Barthes, 1972: 139), in this case the norms of a culture in which Butler claims “in which the false universal of 'man' has for the most part been presupposed as coextensive with humanness itself” (Butler, 1988: 523). If our education is to be reconstructed on principles of social justice, then it is, as Butler suggests, “the presupposition of the category of woman itself that

requires a critical genealogy of the complex institutional and discursive means by which it is constituted" (Butler, 1988: 528).

This is where a media literacy must start; not with a grammar of television but with an immersion in the way worlds are made, following Rancière's example: "I just threw myself into it, starting with a heap of fairly scattered leads that came at me from all sides" (Rancière, 2016: 26). My chapter uses

Loofbourow's (2018) notion of the "male glance" to cut a swathe across both Hoggart's silence and a contemporary complacency that still allows right wing MPs to call for a minister for men! Here is the non-chemical cleansing of the doors of perception in a process once called education: "If our ability to see detail in a woman's face is magnified by our visual habits, our ability to see complexity in a woman's story is diminished by our reading habits" (Loofbourow, 2018). The bottom line is, as Butler makes clear, that "Regardless of the pervasive character of patriarchy and the prevalence of sexual difference as an operative cultural distinction, there is nothing about a binary gender system that is given" (Butler, 1988: 530).

However, it is clear that education does little to help us break these cognitive habits. This leads hopefully to a more emancipatory education which I explore through the rest of the chapter alongside Hoggart's repudiation of a traditional model of education in what is a decent juxtaposition. Donna Haraway perhaps sums it up best when she argues that "The point is to get at how worlds are made and unmade, in order to participate in the processes, in order to foster some forms of life and not others" (Harraway, 1994: 61). Hoggart talks finally and poignantly of "the importance of roots, of unconscious roots, to all of us as individuals" and "the beliefs by which men try to shape their lives" (1957: 317). His finale is strangely contemporary, though its source, Bishop Wilson, is a quarter of a

millennium old: I present them as words that have perhaps always been true: “The number of those who need to be awakened is far greater than that of those who need comfort”(ibid). So we return to the present and echoes of #blacklivesmatter whose ‘stay woke’ element is also historical, recorded by J. Saunders Redding in the twenties when “a black, unionized mine worker told him: “Waking up is a damn sight harder than going to sleep, but we’ll stay woke up longer” (Redding, 1942).

POSTSCRIPT: IN WHICH AN END OF SORTS IS MADE

"There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious." (Eliot, *East Coker*)

"…What the books can teach one
Is that most desires end up in stinking ponds
But we have only to learn to sit still and give no orders
And you offer us your echo and your mirror:
We only have to believe you, then you dare not lie"
(Auden, The Sea and the Mirror)

This chapter briefly referred to in this 'afterword', *Stranger in a Strange* land, is taken from the Tempest 'leg' of an acclaimed trilogy of books about FE which began with 'The Dancing Princesses'. It feels an appropriate place to rest and reflect. The blurb offers this overview:

'Stranger in a strange land' – reclaiming the terrain for a disorientating dilemma. This chapter establishes the need for a *brave new world* beyond the instrumentalist confines of the vocational curriculum. In the Tempest, Shakespeare exiles Prospero to an island in order that he and we might learn something. Prospero is allowed to keep his 'powerful knowledge' (which cost him everything else). Seen from this perspective, Prospero is one who assumes that learning has to do with the acquisition of something 'external', but comes to discover that learning can also be a cumulative state of disorientation, symbolised by the storm that brings the sailors to the island.

The writers seek to usurp the controlled curriculum that dreams of nothing but lifelong alienation and challenge the dogma that "there is no alternative" reality (Thatcher). We agree with Zizek, that "the fundamental level of ideology is not an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality". The new terrain must be built. We do so by destroying the appearance of natural order and by explicitly questioning the responsibility we assume teachers have for the subjectivity of the student, with Caliban and Miranda offering two very different kinds of subjectivity: THE WILD AND THE FREE.

This isn't over, of course, this act of reckless faith, this adventure of the signifier. The work continues, but this commentary must find a place to cease: some arbitrary spot. The pandemic has been, I suspect, a productive time for writers and the next project is always going to be the one that finally makes things clear, that breaks the surface. The truth is that all that I have written since I was offered this opportunity to reflect upon the 'published

work' (or at least a selection of it) both here and beyond has been entirely integrated. As I began to excavate that which I thought had been 'laid down', I soon discovered that what I was writing 'next' was clearly influencing my interpretation of past work and this commentary and that this in turn was being 'turned into/ folded into' the 'new' work.

Since I first started thinking about my published work as something worthy of consideration, I have extended the reach a couple of times as well as producing work which is outside of the reach of this 'retrospective'. The piece I have chosen to mark the final frontier of this study was one of these extensions: it is slight but indicative perhaps of the opportunities offered by the historical moment to think creatively about the future post pandemic. Here is a commitment to a new terrain that must be built, a multiple that must be made. However I also, belatedly see parallels in Prospero's situation of my own experience in this process since I too have been given a chance to step away in order that I might learn something. I too have been allowed, indeed required, to keep my (potentially verifiable) 'powerful knowledge' (which may indeed have cost me… things). Although not consciously directed by the notion that learning has to do with the acquisition of something 'external', I have renewed my faith in the fact that learning can also be a cumulative state of disorientation, that space to play can be vital: "a holding place where learning as 'becoming' thrives in an ongoing process of inner and outer-exploration" (Bennett, Scott & Wilde, 2020: 98)

This is Biesta's beautiful risk:

"However, even if one engages in neatly organised forms of learning, there is always a risk. Not only is there a risk that you won't learn what you wanted to learn. There is also the risk that you will learn things that you couldn't have imagined that you would learn or that you

couldn't have imagined that you would have wanted to learn. And there is the risk that you will learn something that you rather didn't want to learn, something about yourself, for example. To engage in learning always entails the risk that learning may have an impact on you, that learning may change you." (Biesta, 2005: 61)

Record of achievement?

"Eight miles high, and when you touch down / You'll find that it's stranger than known" (The Byrds, *Eight Miles High)*

In this at least I have succeeded, creating new knowledge of and for myself and changing myself and the work in the process. As such this has been a privilege, an unprecedented opportunity to step aside, to take a longer view and to renew. When I try and make clear sense of this, of course I struggle and anyway 'achievement ' is one of the words in my lexicon of lunacy, emptied of any real meaning in contemporary educational discourse. Try though I must, to say what might have been achieved here in this work.

In 1936 a period when he was "changing countries more often than his shoes", Brecht wrote a poem which might help shape this simple response. It was entitled 'Why should my name be mentioned?'. Like me Brecht had done a lot of writing though with a far greater chance that his name on books "would get printed into the new books" (Brecht, *Why should my name be mentioned?*). The poem speaks without immodesty about the integrity of intellectual and creative work, an importance that reaches beyond individuals: his conclusion is that he will be forgotten (as I will and more quickly). I would like to use

Brecht's simple statements to endorse my own work in the same way. I make these points simply and directly:

Firstly, there is the systematic opposition to the ontotheological danger of neo-liberalism in all its manifestations:

"Because I praised the useful, which
In my day was considered base
Because I battled against all religions
Because I fought oppression or
For another reason" (Brecht, *Why Should My Name Be Mentioned?*).

My work represents a sustained optimistic resistance to neoliberalism, which by implication fulfils Deleuze's desired 'resistance to the Present'. I've never seen this as anything other than a fight to the death, by which I mean a very serious business. Faced with governments full of enthusiasm for what Matthew Clarke sardonically terms a "fantasmatic egalitarian meritocracy"(Clarke, 2020:155) , I am happy to take my place among the new enemies of promise. Clarke's example of a system in denial is telling: "We see disavowal at work when, for instance, the role of middle-class values and socioeconomic power in educational success are denied and reframed as purely personal characteristics of aspiration, resilience and resolve" (ibid). With its focus on social justice, Teacher Education is likely to struggle with these simple deceits, since it can muster evidence as well as opinion, for which it too earns the right to be disavowed. Add to this an unproblematised merging of 'good' education and 'good' (i.e. high, rising) results in standardized achievement tests and see the problem.

My work skirmishes with its shock troops, opinions masquerading as simple truths, a heady concoction of common sense and 'facts, facts, facts'. Among its trophies is a decapitated excellence consciously removed from its context and meaning in a landscape where the number of students above average no longer equals the number below average but where much store is set in having rigorous standards in key subjects like mathematics.

It is this that constitutes the incompatibility that Tuck argues defines the relationship between Teacher Education and quality management. In deriding teachers' attempts to make connections between curriculum and students' lived experiences, this model reminds us just how much it is set up antagonistically to Teacher Education. Tuck describes neoliberalism in education "as nihilistic, as death-seeking", insisting that these are the findings of her empirical and theoretical work. She also further seeks controversy, particular within her own national context by theorising neo-liberalism as the latest configuration of settler colonialism. This notion has particular resonance for a Further Education sector colonised by a surveillance culture whose "rights of property and occupation rely upon discovery narratives" (Tuck, 2012). Even the displacing of "Indigenous peoples from their homelands (Wolfe, 1999: 1)" feels oddly familiar to those teachers and teacher educators who in bridging the gap from autonomy to autocracy have lost their footing and bearings. Teacher Education instead promotes a healthier, more meaningful and no less demanding sense of responsibility.

Indeed it has to do with trying to manufacture an alternative which is based on the need to be innovative, to take risks and to trust without condition. Rancière reinforces the importance of this when he writes, "To emancipate an ignorant person, one must be, and one need only be, emancipated oneself, that is to say, conscious of the true power of the human mind"(Rancière, 1991:15).

In some recent and as yet unpublished practitioner research which I supervised, Naomi Knott set out to, in the broadest sense, triangulate the positions of ITE and Quality within a large general FE college in the West Midlands with a view to seeking grounds for collaboration. What she discovered was plenty of personal and professional intent but also an incompatibility, expressed clearest when each side sought cooperation though couched in the language of compromise and reconciliation, an intent that could be generalised but not accommodated. Knott thinks this starts with "the renegotiation of the linguistic landscape" and "new and more meaningful metaphor, suggesting we ditch 'silos' and think 'territories'. This brings us back to Tuck's notion of settlement and occupation and the danger that Teacher Education becomes a colony or even a 'reservation' where noble but dangerous elements can be tolerated and corralled. Later they can be assimilated!

In the course of her research Knott records how her search for the 'potential benefits' of 'an effective partnership' mutated from a leading question and then as a forlorn hope (Knott, 2020). Finally she realised that the offering of 'tentative olive branches' prefigures not a partnership but a treaty, a potential end of hostilities rather than a resolution of differences. This clears the way for progress but also the uncomfortable discovery that such a negotiation is, as far as ITE is concerned, a negotiation with Power, entirely free of the rather fanciful notions of equality carried by the binary's desire to offer balance. Even on the best run reservation the reality of power is uncompromising and what is 'reserved' is loaned not owned.

This is the continuing tenor of my work, the recognition that no compromise can be reached, that , like any war, this must be pursed to its conclusion and that armies of occupation must be persuaded or otherwise forced to withdraw. It remains in the ongoing work I am doing with Knott, in the 'Murder of English' project which Routledge are artfully

trying to ‘soften’ and in the blogpost calling for our abusive relationship with Ofsted to cease delivered a few weeks before last week’s Ofsted visit.

This dovetails neatly into the second aspect of my consistent striving:

Secondly, there is a resistance to all kinds of authority, of mastery and hierarchy

Because I was for people and

Entrusted everything to them, thereby honouring them (Brecht)

In an interview in 2002 Rancière is asked what I would also see as the most pertinent question. Identifying that Rancière’s work, like mine, is concerned “to analyse and condemn any posture of mastery particularly theoretical, pedagogical, ‘academic’ mastery’, the interviewer offers, entirely reasonably: “So may I ask why you started teaching?” (Rancière, 2017: 115). Rancière’s response is that “I am, in the first instance, a student ”(ibid). He goes on to say that “I thought of myself above all as someone who did research and let others know about his research” (op.cit.:116). My own response is less pithy and perhaps less evasive because I am a teacher who simply disputes pretty much all of the ways in which teaching is currently constituted. My work is at odds with models of professionalism enshrined in teacher standards, sharing Winstanley’s view of Law as “the declarative will of conquerors, how they will have their subjects to be ruled” (in Hill, 1972: 269).

Enlisting Butler’s work on the performative productively, I would argue that teacher, like ‘woman’ “is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed: rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted by the stylised repetition of acts”(Butler, 1988:519) . And these routines, I believe, can relatively quickly be changed. These are the resources of hope: a commitment to the dialectic, or at least dialogue in Bakhtin’s sense, as ‘an ideological stance towards meaning making and selfhood’

(Bakhtin, 1981: 346). But this is not a given, it must be worked at because it is pitted forever against the authoritative word that "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally: we encounter it with its authority already fused to it – it demands our unconditional allegiance' (Bakhtin, 1981: 343). This is what I do and it determines the third part of my 'achievement' : how I do it,

Thirdly, I think there is meaningful method in the way this is done

Because I wrote verses and enriched the language

Because I taught practical behaviour or

For some other reason. (Brecht)

McLuhan, whose work is likely to be the subject of our next reimagining, declared that "Anyone who tries to make a distinction between education and entertainment doesn't know the first thing about either" (McLuhan, 1967: 69). My work as a writer, and I mean in the act of writing, continues to explore this premise. Language in Bakhtin's analysis is "far from being a static entity, with fixed meanings," but rather is "a living, social phenomenon dynamically carrying and contributing to the meanings that can be made" (Bakhtin, 1981: 345). Bakhtin identifies the tension between centripetal and centrifugal patterns of intention and action: "the former being the drive to impose one version of truth, the latter involving a range of possible truths and interpretations" (ibid). In such a context I choose like Barthes to write "full out… always concentrated, keen, indefatigable" (Sontag, 1993: viii). This is what I've maintained, for better or worse, in this commentary: to write it in any other way would make no sense. This is why the commentary is unapologetically playful,

though certainly not lacking in seriousness, like Madison “I am playful, but I am not playing” (.Madison cited in Spry, 2016: 176-177) . I choose to believe like Schiller that “playing is the peak of human achievement, only accessible when we are fully human (*der Mensch spielt nur wo er in voller Bedeutung des Worts Mensch ist*) and the only time we are” (*er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt).* (Schiller, 1975: 64)

My approach also seems congruent with that of Rancière. There is lots more of this obviously but one further area of revelation for me is what he says about method and style of writing that at the very least resembles what I am attempting (perhaps not Flaubertian!):

“I systematically avoided relationships of a hierarchical kind, the book being made up essentially of equivalences and displacements: a text cited, a commentary in the form of a paraphrase that displaces it and starts a movement toward another scene; lots of nominal sentences in the commentary, a sort of indirect free style that at its humble level seeks in Flaubertian fashion to unscrew paragraphs so they can slide on top of each other. Obviously that's not a formal principle of fluidity, it's a principle of egalitarian writing , doing away with the hierarchy between the discourse that explains and the discourse that is explained and bringing out a common texture of experience and reflection on that experience which crosses the boundaries between disciplines and the hierarchy of discourses.” (Rancière, 2016: 31)

I wrote early in the commentary about sharing Barthes’s intention to “delight continuously, endlessly, in writing as a perpetual production” but have come to appreciate how a better understanding of earlier work might help rather than impede this commitment (in Sontag, ed.1993; 419). Because, commit we must; only perseverance keeps honour bright. And so

we must return to whatever it is we're doing, to 'teaching itself' and like Charles Smithson at the end of Fowles' epoch defining novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* must realise that life "not a symbol, is not one riddle and one failure to guess, is not to inhabit one face alone or to be given up after one losing throw of the dice, but is to be, however inadequately, emptily, hopelessly, into the city's iron heart, endured. And out again upon the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea" (Fowles, 1967: 467).

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